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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

VOICE IN THE POETRY OF T. S. ELIOT

by

(C)

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and  
recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance,  
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## ABSTRACT

Writing in his essay "Matthew Arnold" (1933), Eliot defines the "auditory imagination" as "...the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality."

Eliot's interest in the "auditory imagination" did not begin or end with this definition. Eliot had previously examined the implications of such a feeling for the word in his essay "Lancelot Andrewes" (1926), an essay in which he reconsiders the place he had given to Donne in "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921). He also considers the work of Milton in terms of the "auditory imagination" in "Milton I" (1936). Eliot's continuing critical interest in the "auditory imagination" is manifested throughout his essays, and its relevance for his poetry can be found in the two essays, "The Music of Poetry" (1942) and "The Three Voices of Poetry" (1953).

In Eliot's early poetry, the voice is usually linked to a persona or mask such as Prufrock or Gerontion. The voice is the outward manifestation of the "auditory imagination," of the feeling for syllable and rhythm. Just as Eliot continued to examine and re-examine the place of the "auditory imagination" in his criticism, he continually experiments with voice and vocal rhythms in his poetry. Prufrock presents a voice within a particular zone of consciousness, a voice



appropriate to Prufrock's experience. In the later poetry, however, voice loses its attachment to a particular persona; even in The Waste Land one can never be sure how much is said by Tiresias and how much is spoken by other voices through him.

In Four Quartets, Eliot achieves mastery over the voices in the poems. The unity of the voices is in the Voice which speaks without personae throughout the Quartets. The unity is achieved paradoxically through its disparity; and it is through the Voice that Eliot can reach beyond voice in the Quartets. The movement within the Quartets, and throughout all of Eliot's poetry, is toward a purity of expression which only the real and personal voice of the poet can achieve.

Within the context of his definition of the "auditory imagination," and in conjunction with his use of the technique of allusion in his poetry, Eliot's use of voice becomes the distinguishing mark of his poetry. He is not only aware of the subtleties of its varying rhythms, but is also receptive as a listener to the vagaries of speech. His emphasis on voice, both in his criticism and his poetry, shows the importance of this interest to a study of his work. Only through the voices, the voice of Eliot and the voices that he chooses to echo in his poetry, can we realize the meaning or share in the experience which is an integral part of that poetry.



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## CHAPTER I

### THE VOICES AND THE CRITICS

Historically T. S. Eliot must occupy a prominent position in any survey of the English literature of the twentieth century. Yet, however aware the critics and readers are of his importance, there still remains endless discussion about the nature of his contribution to the literature of the modern period. His career as an artist and critic spanned nearly fifty years and if there are still those who disagree about his stature as a poet, dramatist, or a critic, hardly anyone would deny that he had been a great influence.

David Daiches, for instance, believes that as a poet Eliot is a minor figure and that his main interest is historical as the man who gave poetry its new direction in the twenties. Leavis says in The Common Pursuit that "It is not only that Eliot has reorientated criticism and poetic practice, effecting a profound change in the operative current of the English tradition, and that in this achievement his critical writings have played an indispensable part. It is also that the best of these writings represent more powerfully and incisively the idea of literary criticism as a discipline--a special discipline of the intelligence."<sup>1</sup>

Eliot notes in The Sacred Wood (1920) that "The important critic is the person who is absorbed in the present problems of art, and who wishes to bring the forces of the past to bear on the solution of these problems."<sup>2</sup> In 1937 Eliot wrote in The Criterion that "The period which may be said to have begun about 1910 had its own critical requirements, which were not those of a general assessment of the literature of the past. What was needed was a critical activity to revivify creative



writing, to introduce new material and new technique from other countries and other times."<sup>3</sup> As a critic Eliot was involved in the poetic process of his own time. As he was to note in 1961: "I was implicitly defending the sort of poetry that I and my friends wrote."<sup>4</sup> Even though much of the interest today is in Eliot's critical work, it is well not to forget that the publication of his poetry, from Prufrock to Four Quartets, provoked a furor of discussion which is of more than merely historical interest.

One of the major difficulties with Eliot is that while his criticism is exclusively his own and can be countered on its own merits, his poetic technique, the technique of allusion, causes a multitude of problems. His borrowings are not merely accidents nor are they plagiarisms in the proper sense of that word. In "Philip Massinger" (1920) he notes: "Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it something better, or at least something different. A good poet welds his theft into a whole of feeling which is unique, utterly different from that from which it was torn; the bad poet throws it into something which has no cohesion."<sup>5</sup> In Eliot's sense, the important poet brings the voices of the past into the present and embodies them in his poetry.

The voices of the past, though they exist in Eliot's poetry as early as Prufrock, created much of the controversy which surrounded the appearance of The Waste Land. After Ezra Pound had pruned the original version and harassed the editor of The Dial, the poem finally appeared in America in November of 1922. Already Eliot had published the poem in England in the first number of The Criterion (October, 1922). Following this publication many of the reviewers expressed a personal reaction to the poem. Some were not even sure that it was a poem, while at least one



mentioned the possibility of a hoax.<sup>6</sup>

Amy Lowell said, "But Tom is an intellectual and an intellectual cannot write a poem, which is a matter of heart and emotion."<sup>7</sup> Others, such as David Craig, saw the "depression" of The Waste Land in personal terms. Craig felt that it was "one of the outstanding cases...of a work which projects an almost defeatist personal depression in the guise of a full, impersonal picture of society."<sup>8</sup> And Edmund Wilson, who first reviewed the poem in the December issue of The Dial, felt obliged to point out: "There is a certain grudging margin, to be sure, about all that Mr. Eliot writes--as if he were compensating himself for his limitations by a peevish assumption of superiority. But it is the very acuteness of his suffering which gives such poignancy to his art."<sup>9</sup>

The most valuable criticism of Eliot's work comes not from any one individual; rather, it arises from the dialectic among different studies of Eliot's technique. For instance I. A. Richards said, "Allusion...is a technical device for compression."<sup>10</sup> He went on to note:

If it were desired to label in three words the most characteristic feature of Mr. Eliot's technique, this might be done by calling his poetry a 'music of ideas.' The ideas are of all kinds, abstract and concrete, general and particular, and, like the musician's phrases, they are arranged, not that he may tell us something, but that their effects in us may combine into a coherent whole of feeling and attitude and provide a peculiar liberation of the will. They are to be responded to, not to be pondered or worked out.<sup>11</sup>

F. R. Leavis was in agreement with Dr. Richards concerning a 'music of ideas,' and, from a similar point of view, Cleanth Brooks saw Eliot working "in terms of surface parallelisms which...make ironical contrasts."<sup>12</sup> Brooks concludes:

The method adopted in The Waste Land is thus violent and radical, but thoroughly necessary. For the renewing and vitalizing of symbols which have been crusted over with a distorting familiarity demands the type of organization which we have already commented upon in discussing particular passages: the statement of surface similarities which are ironically



revealed to be dissimilarities, and the association of apparently obvious dissimilarities which culminates in a later realization that the dissimilarities are only superficial--that the chains of likeness are in reality fundamental. In this way the statement of beliefs emerges through confusion and cynicism--not in spite of them.<sup>13</sup>

While Leavis, Richards and Brooks, among others, believed that Eliot was successful in the application of his technique, others were more dubious in their appraisals. Yvor Winters believed, "The method is that of a man who is unable to deal with his subject, and resorts to a rough approximation of quotation...it betokens the death of the mind and the sensibility alike."<sup>14</sup> "The proof of the failure of this poem," according to Karl Shapiro, "is that no one has ever been able to proceed from it, including Eliot himself.

It is, in fact, not a form at all but a negative version of form."<sup>15</sup> Writing in The New Republic, Conrad Aiken insisted that the reverse was true, "that the poem succeeds...by virtue of its incoherence, not of its plan; by virtue of its ambiguities, not of its explanations. Its incoherence is a virtue because its donnée is incoherence."<sup>16</sup> These critics saw The Waste Land as destructive of the formal aspects of poetry. As such it resisted most of their attempts at classification.

A particularly pertinent complaint was made against the author of The Waste Land by two of his early reviewers. Both the reviewer for The Times Literary Supplement and Charles Powell, who reviewed the poem for the Manchester Guardian, expressed dissatisfaction with Eliot's method. Powell claimed that when Eliot spoke with his own voice he was inconsistent and noted, "that if Mr. Eliot had been pleased to write in demotic English The Waste Land might not have been, as it just is to all but anthropologists and literati so much waste paper."<sup>17</sup> The reviewer for The Times said, "The method has a number of theoretical justifications...but we do sometimes wish to hear the poet's full voice. Perhaps if the reader were sufficiently sophisticated he would find these echoes suggestive hints,



as rich in significance as the sonorous amplifications of the romantic poets. None the less, we do not derive from this poem as a whole the satisfaction we ask from poetry."<sup>18</sup> What the reviewer meant by Eliot's full voice is not enlarged upon; however, it does raise some questions.

Is the poet's voice in The Waste Land and later in Four Quartets merely a medley of pirated quotations? At this point in the discussion one might note the gradual depersonification of Eliot's poetry. The movement from the voice of Prufrock through that of Tiresias to the voice without persona of the Quartets shows important developments in Eliot's interest in voice, developments which may have ended for his poetry in Little Gidding but which were continued in his poetic drama. I will discuss the significance of this movement in my last chapter.

It is not sufficient to approach voice simply through a recognition of Eliot's interest in language. An attempt to understand what he meant by purifying "the dialect of the tribe" provides only a partial answer. One must begin with Eliot's definition of the "auditory imagination" and then use his definition to probe his use of voice in his poetry. Only in this way can one hope to understand the significance of the voices Eliot chooses to echo in relation to their place in the poetry and to understand the significance of the passage he borrows in relation to the voice.



## CHAPTER II

### THE AUDITORY IMAGINATION: THE FEELING FOR SYLLABLE AND RHYTHM

The greatest threat to a balanced discussion of the work of any poet who affects the reader emotionally is a lapse into sentimentality. It is impossible for me to deny the surge of emotion which rises when I read the last lines of The Waste Land or Little Gidding. Eliot himself was fully aware of this danger. In "Tradition and The Individual Talent" (1919) he distinguished between the appreciation of "sincere emotion" in poetry and the ability to know "when there is an expression of significant emotion, emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet,"<sup>1</sup> or one might add, in the history of the reader.

That in any comparison of Eliot's poetry and criticism particular logical fallacies appear is well documented.<sup>2</sup> For instance, Eliot's statement: "I should say that in one's prose reflections one may be legitimately occupied with ideals, whereas in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality,"<sup>3</sup> is often thought to indicate an avoidance of responsibility. Nothing could be more false for such a statement portrays an acute awareness of the needs of poetry. There is more to be said on this subject later in the chapter. In his prose writings, Eliot takes care to date his essays so that the reader is aware when the particular statement was made. Eliot draws attention to his own practice in "To Criticize The Critic" (1961). Here he notes that "When I publish a collection of essays, or whenever I allow an essay to be re-published elsewhere, I make a point of indicating the original date of publication,



as a reminder to the reader of the distance of the time that separates the author when he wrote it from the author he is today."<sup>4</sup>

## II

In his essay "Matthew Arnold" (1933) Eliot defines the auditory imagination:

What I call the 'auditory imagination' is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.<sup>5</sup>

There is a distinction or a difference in emphasis between his definition and what Eliot has to say of Milton "whose gifts," he remarks, "were naturally aural."<sup>6</sup> In the essay in which he observes that Milton "writes English like a dead language,"<sup>7</sup> "Milton I" (1936), Eliot speaks of Milton's "auditory imagination" but the reader recognizes that in Milton's case what Eliot here calls an "auditory imagination" is not altogether an asset. Milton's poetry, Eliot reminds his reader, depends mainly on its auditory appeal, on a "hypertrophy of the auditory imagination at the expense of the visual and tactile, so that the inner meaning is separated from the surface...."<sup>8</sup> He claims that Milton lacked visual imagination long before his blindness. At this juncture he contrasts Milton, perhaps unfairly, with James Joyce, who despite his failing eyesight, managed to combine the auditory and visual in his work, although in Work in Progress the auditory imagination is "abnormally sharpened at the expense of the visual."<sup>9</sup> The essay on Milton is a reminder that the "auditory imagination" too is subject to the dangers of what he calls in his essay "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) a "dissociation of sensibility," a modification which he said, then, had been aggravated by the work of



both Milton and Dryden.<sup>10</sup> Eliot's continuing preoccupation with the problem of the auditory imagination in his critical essays suggests the importance of this concern in the development of his own creative activity.

It is apparent in Eliot's definition in his essay on Matthew Arnold that there is a relation between his feelings for the auditory imagination and his statements about tradition. In "Tradition and The Individual Talent" he speaks of the historical sense of the artist: "This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity. No poet, no artist, of any art, has complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists."<sup>11</sup> A page later Eliot notes that "the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show."<sup>12</sup> This awareness of the past, of the voices of the dead poets, and Eliot's personal debt to many of them exists throughout his critical work. The voices of the past, as well as the voices of the present, can be found in his poetry. The genesis of a voice or an image does not explain that voice or image.

Much of Eliot's direct discussion of voice is found in two essays: "The Three Voices of Poetry" (1953) and "The Music of Poetry" (1942). The three voices of poetry are the voice of the poet talking to himself, the voice of the poet talking to an audience and the voice of the poet talking through a dramatic character, a persona or mask.<sup>13</sup> In the first the form is essentially a function of the form of the poem,



and the form and the material become readily identified with each other; in the other two, the form is to some extent given though it can be transformed at any time.<sup>14</sup> These three voices are not mutually exclusive: all can operate or interrelate in a poem. While in the first two there need be little action, the voice need only to sound through the creative activity of the poet, a dramatic character can only be made real in action, that is in the context of speaking voices. Accordingly, "All that matters is, that in the end, the voices should be in harmony...."<sup>15</sup>

"The Music of Poetry" concerns itself with language and the relation of music to speech: "The music of poetry, then, must be a music latent in the common speech of its time."<sup>16</sup> The music of poetry is a part of the meaning of poetry. Even though blank verse is a formal speech pattern, blank verse is close enough in rhythm to the rhythm underlying everyday speech to enable Shakespeare to use it as if it were the common speech. For Eliot: "The music of the word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all other meanings that it had in other contexts, to its greater or lesser wealth of association."<sup>17</sup> Eliot notes from his own poetic experience, "that a poem, or a passage from a poem, may tend to realize itself first as a particular rhythm, and that this rhythm may bring to birth the idea and the image."<sup>18</sup> Such a feeling for rhythm leads Eliot, in his essay on Dante (1929), to observe that genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood.<sup>19</sup>

### III

Since voice is the phrasing of language, not only for expression



but for communication, it is worthwhile to note the emphasis Eliot places on the poet's responsibility to language. Writing in Notes Towards The Definition of Culture (1948), Eliot holds that for culture, "there is no greater safeguard more reliable than a language."<sup>20</sup> And in accord with this, he says in "The Social Function of Poetry" (1945) that a poet's direct duty is to his language, and that in the exercise of this duty poetry does, "in proportion to its excellence and vigour, affect the speech and the sensibility of the whole nation."<sup>21</sup> Such a view leads Eliot in "What is a Classic" (1944) to say: "When a great poet is also a great classic poet, he exhausts, not a form only, but the language of his time; and the language of his time, as used by him, will be the language in its perfection."<sup>22</sup> For this reason, in relation to form, Eliot pointed out it was impossible for the successors of Milton to write a great epic, and, in relation to language, impossible for the successors of Shakespeare to write effectively in blank verse. Eliot is sure that "such a situation is inevitable, and it persists until the language has so altered that there is no danger, because no possibility of imitation."<sup>23</sup>

There is no doubt that, like Pound, Eliot was concerned with the state of language in his own time.<sup>24</sup> In On Poetry and Poets Eliot records: "But amongst the varieties of chaos in which there are discoverable no standards of writing, and an increasing indifference to the etymology and the history of the use of words. And of the responsibility of our poets and our critics for the preservation of the language, we need to be repeatedly reminded."<sup>25</sup> It is because of this incipient chaos, or perhaps in spite of it, that "The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in



order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning."<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that the role of the poet is to create a private language; his debt is to the language in which he lives. It is probable, as Eliot says, that a poet can only feel in his own language.<sup>27</sup> And the significance of a writer like Joyce or Yeats is that they can feel in their own idiom whether it is native or created.

A poet's debt is to his tradition: "...in poetry there is no such thing as complete originality, owing nothing to the past. Whenever a Virgil, a Dante, a Shakespeare, a Goethe is born, the whole future of European poetry is altered. When a great poet has lived, certain things have been done once for all, and cannot be achieved again; but, on the other hand, every great poet adds something to the complex material out of which future poetry will be written."<sup>28</sup> The possibility of poetic revival depends on a literature's "ability to receive and assimilate influences from abroad," and "its ability to go back and learn from its own sources."<sup>29</sup>

The poet as harbinger of this renewal must necessarily be a great poet in order to be effective. For: "Surely the great poet is among other things, one who not merely restores a tradition which has been in abeyance, but one who in his poetry re-twines as many straying strands of tradition as possible."<sup>30</sup> Only in this way can continuity with the past be preserved. Even though each generation "makes its own demands upon art, and has its own uses for art,"<sup>31</sup> there must be a continuing sense of tradition--the poet must have the feeling of it, and be continually aware that he has predecessors, that he has roots. The relation between the poet and his predecessors must not be like that between Virgil and Statius who were only shadows to one another.



Eliot himself did more than observe such relationships. He says in "The Metaphysical Poets" that "The possible interests of a poet are unlimited; the more intelligent he is the more likely that he will have interests: our only condition is that he turn them into poetry, and not merely meditate on them poetically."<sup>32</sup> The poet has "not a personality to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality."<sup>33</sup> Eliot reminds us in "Tradition and The Individual Talent" that if we do not concentrate exclusively on those aspects of a poet's work which seem individual to him "...we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."<sup>34</sup> As a critic Eliot is a successor of Aristotle, Johnson, Coleridge and, in some ways, of Arnold: as a poet he inherits and borrows from a seemingly endless list of authors. His relationships, however, are not simply academic or random but are ordered by his own consciousness of what was for him a living tradition.

What the reading of other critics did for Eliot was to sharpen his awareness that criticism to be meaningful to a particular generation must be constantly renewed. What the reading of other poets did for Eliot was to train his ear. Pound, in a letter to Harriet Monroe, records that Eliot had undertaken to train himself as a poet: "He is the only American I know of who has made what I can call an adequate preparation for writing. He has actually trained himself and modernized himself on his own. The rest of the promising young have done one or the other but never both (most of the swine have done neither)."<sup>35</sup> An "ear" for poetry is the immediate apprehension of rhythm and diction; it precedes understanding. As Eliot notes of Pound's poetry: "What



the poems do require is a trained ear, or at least the willingness to be trained."<sup>36</sup> How much of Eliot's training may be due to the influence of Pound will probably remain obscure. What is known however is that he was greatly influenced by such French poets as Jules Laforgue and Tristan Corbière. It is to these poets, as well as to Pound and perhaps to John Donne, that Eliot owes much, for they all had the ability to use simple phrasing and could "dislocate language" into their meaning.

Eliot reacted against Arnold's poetry for though he felt that Arnold was a great academic poet, he was convinced that Arnold was not "highly sensitive to the musical qualities of verse."<sup>37</sup> Similarly it was "the subordination of musical interest"<sup>38</sup> in Kipling which caused Eliot to relegate him to a minor position. Conversely he admires Shakespeare because of his ability to handle the musical qualities of blank verse. He says of blank verse: "The English ear is (or was) more sensitive to the music of the verse and less dependent upon the recurrence of identical sounds in this metre than in any other."<sup>39</sup> Shakespeare and other great writers have the ability to write transparently, "our attention is directed to the object and not to the medium."<sup>40</sup>

Eliot, however, continually re-examines his relationship to other poets; for instance, his relationship to Donne. Although in his essay "The Metaphysical Poets," Eliot spoke of Donne's unified sensibility, his ability to amalgamate "disparate experience," to experience thought in a way which "modified his sensibility,"<sup>41</sup> in 1926 in "Lancelot Andrewes," an essay in which he again considers Donne's poetry, he reconsiders the problem of the relation between the poet and the object, specifically the relationship between the poet and the word. His particular concern in the essay is with "ordonnance, or arrangement and



structure, precision in the use of words and relevant intensity."<sup>42</sup>

His focus on Andrewes makes him reconsider Donne. "Andrewes," he says, "takes a word and derives the world from it; squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning which we should never have supposed any word to possess."<sup>43</sup> Eliot continues and notes that Donne "is constantly finding an object which shall be adequate to his feelings; Andrewes is wholly absorbed in the object and therefore responds with the adequate emotion."<sup>44</sup> Like Andrewes, Eliot directed himself in his writing to gaze "steadfastly at the object," both as a critic and as a poet, and to respond directly to the word.

Eliot's greatest debt can be summarized by quoting the following passage from his essay on Dante. It concerns Dante's worth to English poets:

I tried to illustrate his universal mastery in the use of images. In the actual writing I went so far as to say that he is safer to follow, even for us, than any English poet, including Shakespeare. My second point is that Dante's 'allegorical' method has great advantages for the writing of poetry: it simplifies the diction, and makes clear and precise the images. That in good allegory, like Dante's, it is not necessary to understand the meaning first to enjoy the poetry, but that our enjoyment of the poetry makes us want to understand the meaning. And the third point is that the Divine Comedy is a complete scale of the depths and heights of human emotion; that the Purgatorio and Paradiso are to be read as extensions of the ordinarily very limited human range. Every degree of the feeling of humanity, from the lowest to the highest, has, moreover, an intimate relation to the next above and below, and all fit together according to the logic of sensibility.<sup>45</sup>

Although Eliot's comments on voice are fewer than his statements about language, in them various elements are brought together and assimilated. In all his work there is an insistence upon the place of tradition and the poet's responsibility to his language. In The Waste Land and Four Quartets the various facets of his interests appear in his use of the voices of other poets: Dante, Shakespeare, Virgil and many others. In his criticism he sometimes notes of an author, as in his discussion of



Middleton, that he remains "merely a name, a voice...."<sup>46</sup> At other times, he shows how one author echoes another, as Massinger echoes Shakespeare. It is also apparent in such statements as, "I myself should like an audience which could neither read nor write,"<sup>47</sup> that he desires his audience to listen--that the true vehicle, better, the universal vehicle for poetry is the voice and not the printed page.

Eliot's interest in poetic drama--his tracing of blank verse from its origin in the declaimed verse of Seneca, through Marlowe's experiments to its ultimate blossoming in the poetry and drama of Shakespeare, is just one example which emphasizes the importance he placed on the role of voice. His early interests in "vers libre" and "imagism" are well known. Eliot's own statements about borrowing from other writers might be compared to one of Pound's "Don'ts for Imagists": "Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright or try to conceal it."<sup>48</sup> Another figure for whom Eliot had great respect was T. E. Hulme. Hulme's short article "Contempt for Language" is worth quoting in its entirety:

Enlightenment comes when we see that literature is not a vision, but a voice, or a line of letters in a black border. Vision is the sight of the quaint (?) shadows in things, of the lone trees on the hill, and the hills in life; not the deed, but the shadow cast by the deed. The art of literature consists exactly in this passage from the Eye to the Voice. From the wealth of nature to that thin shadow of words, that gramophone. The readers are the people who see things and want them expressed. The author is the voice, or the conjuror who does tricks with that curious rope of letters, which is quite different from real passion and sight. The prose writer drags meaning along with the rope. The poet makes it stand on end and hit you. The sentence and the worm are the most stupid of animals and the most difficult to teach tricks. They have a tendency to crawl along; it requires genius, music to make them stand up (snake charmers). The uncomfortable vision of all prose as merely a line of string lying on a paper.<sup>49</sup>



Although Eliot may have disagreed with some of what Hulme had to say, the passage serves to show some of the interests of the literary climate early in Eliot's career.

An inquiry relevant at this point might concern the number of possible ways in which voice can be used. Eliot himself in broad category speaks of "The Three Voices of Poetry." The category which involves persona raises the largest number of questions. Another problem is the means of borrowing from other writers, the problem Eliot discusses in the essay on Philip Massinger. Imitation and stealing, both of which appear to carry overtones of moral condemnation, are the most relevant to Eliot's poetic method for both require the working of the conscious mind. The echo, as in Massinger's echoes of Shakespeare, is the least conscious of the three. The last method of borrowing is of particular interest to the reader for often a word or a phrase forces itself on the reader's imagination without his awareness of its source.

Another level of borrowing, which need only be mentioned in passing, is translation. Eliot's only published piece of translation was Anabasis by St.-John Perse, but there are germinal roots of translation or transliteration throughout his poetry. Hugh Kenner provides an interesting comment: "A contemporary translation is as much a creative feat as a contemporary poem. These terms are in one way very misleading: a contemporary translation is a contemporary poem. While their explicit materials differ, both involve the same linking, for creative purposes, of a critical sense and technical resource."<sup>50</sup> Such a trend of thought is discernible in Eliot's assertions about translations and interpretations. For instance: that the "bloody tragedies" of the Jacobean writers were not the use of Seneca's use of that mode but the Jacobean playwrights' interpretation of what Seneca meant to them;



likewise, the Elizabethans' employment of Machiavelli is an interpretation of what Machiavelli meant to a particular group of men at a particular time. In both cases, the relation of the actual to the interpreted is different simply because in forming their interpretations the Elizabethans and the Jacobeans were influenced by their own interests, persuasions and prejudices.



### CHAPTER III

#### SPEAKING MASKS,

#### JAZZ RHYTHM AND PRAYER

According to George T. Wright in The Poet in The Poem, the poem for Eliot "recapitulates the tradition of poems both by continuing specific allusions and by echoing in form and tone the poetic achievements of the past. It further reproduces the humanness omnipresent in the world by the multiplicity of authors and characters whom it recalls or vaguely echoes and who give to the world its specific character."<sup>1</sup> These authors and characters appear as the personae of the poems. Persona means mask. It is the mask the author wears; it is also the voice with which he speaks. But as Wright and many others make clear the persona does not present or speak with the voice of the author. The author is in the same position as the reader, he too is a reader or a listener. In another sense, the sense of the troubador or lyric poet, the poet is also the singer. The voice with which the persona speaks is the voice of that persona, as personal and individual as any human voice.

The persona is a dramatic character: he is created through action: he exists in action. Tiresias, in The Waste Land, is created through the action of the poet as any dramatic character is by the words that the poet writes. The persona takes on his reality, his own life, through his action in the poem. In the seduction of the typist by the "young man carbuncular," Tiresias makes three comments. In each comment he first makes known his identity. In his first lines he establishes his presence as witness:

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,  
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see

A few lines later he reasserts his presence before the arrival of the clerk:



I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dogs  
 Perceived the scene and foretold the rest--  
 I too awaited the expected guest.

Finally, he offers the parenthetical comment which concludes the scene.

It is made with the same slow, deliberate resolution--the "And" of the first line providing the added emphasis of finality:

(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
 Enacted on this same divan or bed;  
 I who have sat by Thebes below the wall  
 And walked among the lowest of the dead.)

Tiresias is a witness freed from temporal and spatial limitation. Though blind, he can see. He has perceived the scene and can tell what is to come. More importantly, he can experience both the feelings of the clerk and the typist. The sterility of the situation is caught in his use of the word "foresuffered." There is no love and, at this point, no hope for any. He and the objects of his attention are still among "the lowest of the dead."

Wright believes that the scanty individuation of the characters, Madame Sosostris, Mrs. Equitone, Albert, Lil and the others in The Waste Land, makes them unstable. As a result of this instability, the characters tend to melt into each other.<sup>2</sup> The observation is borne out by Eliot's note on Tiresias: "Tiresias, although a mere spectator and not indeed a 'character,' is yet the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest. Just as the one-eyed merchant, seller of currants, melts into the Phoenician sailor, and the latter is not wholly distinct from Ferdinand Prince of Naples, so all the women are one woman, and the two sexes meet in Tiresias. What Tiresias sees, in fact, is the substance of the poem."<sup>3</sup>

Under analysis, Eliot's use of personae is quite straightforward. The personae of the early poems, Pruferock, Rhapsody on a Windy Night, Gerontion and those poems written up to the time he published The Hollow Men



(1925), all have set attitudes toward the world. To use Wright's phrase, the personae are "arrested": we do not observe them undergo any process of revelation or transformation.<sup>4</sup> In the later poems, from the Journey of The Magi to the Four Quartets (though the Quartets are a special case), the personae are endowed with movement and most undergo some facet of self-examination. As Wright says, "the souls of the early speakers remain still for the sitting; the souls of the later speakers are in the process of significant transformation, are, in effect, in Purgatory."<sup>5</sup>

Pru<sup>f</sup>frock, the most clearly delineated of Eliot's personae represents the persona who talks about himself:

I grow old...I grow old...  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.  
I have heard the mermaids singing each to each

Everything Prufrock says reveals his attitudes, his fear, his subservience, his resignation and his isolation. Another type of persona in the early poems is the observer. The personae of the Preludes are observers:

The winter evening settles down  
With smells of steaks in passageways,

and,

You had such a vision of the street  
As the street hardly understands.

The passages involving Tiresias in The Waste Land show a similar awareness of the outer world, except that Tiresias is aware of more than an ordinary observer because he has "foresuffered all." In the later poems, according to Wright, some of the personae are the same as these earlier ones--they are the men who suffer, who think, who experience, who listen; conversely, the Four Quartets present personae who are more detached, in fact, there is some question as to the existence of personae at all.<sup>6</sup> In all aspects



however, and here Wright reiterates Eliot's insistence on the sovereignty of the poem: "the poem is the thing, and in the poem the statement of belief is presented, not confessed; the feelings of the speaker are depicted, not shared; and the persona is a point of view in the poem, not the point of view of the poet."<sup>7</sup>

Wright makes a distinction commonly made by Eliot's readers, that there is a difference of great significance between the poetry written before and after 1925, the date of The Hollow Men. The difference is that before this time the emphasis in the poetry is on corruption while after 1925 the emphasis is on possible redemption.<sup>8</sup> The distinction has also been termed that between the period before and the period after Eliot's confession of Anglo-Catholicism. It is possible that some may interpret the epigraph to The Hollow Men, added to the poem in Collected Poems, "Mistah Kurtz--he dead," as a reference to Eliot, possibly an expression of hope that the renewal expressed at the end of The Waste Land is about to become a reality, or possibly an expression of the hope that death will be immediately followed by redemption. The importance attached to this change of emphasis, if it is indeed a change, is fallacious. It is not that Eliot had decided to abandon the possibility of Buddhism for Anglo-Catholicism: the case for a sudden transformation does not exist. Eliot is no Carlyle: there was no fire-Baptism.

In any great artist there is always a continuity of thought and feeling, and this continuity is present in Eliot's work. Eliot's observation of the waste of modern European civilization, even in all its sterility and corruption, contains the seeds of hope. The fact that the question--"Shall I at least set my lands in order?"--is put, is surely a sign that redemption is possible. Rain will eventually come to the land;



hopefully, the land is "parched" rather than "arid." Hope is inherent in the directives of the Buddha: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata," even though we have no immediate way of responding to them in the context of the poem. More than this cannot be said. To speak of a spiritual breakthrough at this time in Eliot's life is to create an artificial barrier to the understanding of his poetry, and it denies to the Four Quartets much of their significance. One would think that Wright, who sees Eliot essentially as a "quester," would not be shortsighted enough to suppose that a quest begins in redemption. The odyssey must, by necessity, be a movement from the "fragments" which the voice in The Waste Land says "I have shored against my ruins," to the realization that "the fire and the rose are one." To interpose the sudden change is to impair the significance of the quest. Helen Gardner's view that the experience which gave us the Four Quartets makes invalid the experience which gave us The Waste Land is, I think, fallacious for similar reasons.<sup>9</sup>

## II

The etymological and cultural roots of the word persona combine to place the emphasis on voice. From its original meaning as mask, the word persona came to refer to the speaking hole in the mask and was later associated with the voice, the speech of the actor through the mask. Eliot's definition of the auditory imagination does not explicitly mention voice but in the reference to "the feeling for syllable and rhythm" the meaning is plain. Leonard Unger sees voice as the distinguishing mark of Eliot's poetry.<sup>10</sup> Helen Gardner, in The Art of T. S. Eliot, approaches his use of voice from a point of view which emphasizes the importance of language in the Four Quartets. The last section of each of the Quartets,



with the possible exception of The Dry Salvages, begins with a statement on language and the difficulties of using words. The lines from Burnt Norton illustrate:

Words move, music moves  
 Only in time; but that which is only living  
 Can only die. Words, after speech, reach  
 Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,  
 Can words or music reach  
 The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
 Moves perpetually in its stillness.  
 Not the stillness of the violin, while the note lasts,  
 Not that only, but the coexistence,  
 Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
 And the end and the beginning were always there  
 Before the beginning and after the end.  
 And all is always now. Words strain,  
 Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
 Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
 Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
 Will not stay still. Shrieking voices  
 Scolding, mocking, or merely chattering,  
 Always assail them. The Word in the desert  
 Is most attacked by voices of temptation,  
 The crying shadow in the funeral dance,  
 The loud lament of the disconsolate chimera.

The working of Eliot's poetic imagination can be seen in this passage as he moves from words to the Word; from the stillness of the Chinese jar to the clamour of "Shrieking voices."

The core of Miss Gardner's treatment of the auditory imagination concerns the development of Eliot's verse form from his use of the heroic line to blank verse to the line with the four heavy stresses which appears with little variation throughout the Four Quartets. The study of Eliot's poetic rhythm is central to her interpretation of the various sections of the poem's musical structure.<sup>11</sup>

Hugh Kenner, on the other hand, though often concerned with the rhythm of Eliot's poetry, says: "For the word, in Eliot's imagination, relates itself most immediately not to any object which it names, not to the dictionary or to a system of discourse, but to the Voice which is the



persisting reality, the entranced self-expending élan vital of which each word is a momentary modulation, each word 'communicating', because it is not an atom of meaning but a renewed occasion for the Voice, 'before it is understood'.<sup>12</sup> Kenner is almost singular among Eliot's critics in placing the importance, both in his understanding of Eliot's poetry and in his criticism of it, squarely on voice and how it is used.

Because of the emphasis Eliot places on tradition and the remembering of forgotten rhythms, it is possible that he believed, as Pound did, in an ultimate and absolute rhythm. Pound says in his introduction to Cavalcanti that "Rhythm is perhaps the most primal of all things known to us...."<sup>13</sup> F. O. Matthiessen notes that Eliot knows "of the fact that poetic rhythm by means of its power of incantation is able to renew one of the most primitive elements of man's experience at the same time that it gives expression to the last subtle nuances of civilized feeling...."<sup>14</sup> The similarity with Pound, however, extends further.

In an article on Pound's Cantos, entitled "Blood for the Ghosts," Kenner analyses Pound's use of voice and his translation of voices which speak in another idiom. Most importantly, Kenner notes that "psyche" means breath, and that in the phrase "Psyche te mēnos te" Homer equates breath with strength. Although emphasis on the breath has direct application to Pound's feeling that art is "detailed intimate attention, attention flowing down into the cunning articulation of sound with sound,"<sup>15</sup> it is also relevant to Eliot's feeling for language and rhythm. Kenner documents Pound's use of the voice of Whitman in Canto LXXXII and how this commerce between them has come about. Pound says, "We have one sap and one root."<sup>16</sup> There is a similar bond between Eliot and those voices which appear in his poetry. The voices are a part of his tradition and they share the same



roots. The place of Dante in The Waste Land is like that of Whitman in Canto LXXXII: "spirit: anima: psyche."<sup>17</sup> The labour involved in both is of a similar nature: "labour aimed at working cadences and rhythms into the blood: mastering the cadences of the dead, their breathing (psyche); miming the beat their pulses shaped, the lips and throat moving as theirs moves, that the whole man might be open to their possession."<sup>18</sup>

There is another parallel between the way in which Pound and Eliot use voice for its sound rather than for its meaning. Pound illustrates in the following way. The line "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita" can be rendered as "If you fall off the step you'll break your ankle." The sound of the line however is comparable as a "sonoric system" to:

Eyes, dreams, lips, and the night goes.

--Nel  
mezzo del  
cammin di  
nostra  
vita.<sup>19</sup>

Eliot, in using the line "Poi s'asconde nel foco che gli affina" in the last stanza of The Waste Land, is perhaps concerned initially with its meaning--"Then he dived back into that fire which refines them." However, the line has the same sonorous quality as "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita," and given that great poetry, like Dante's, can communicate before it is understood, it is not altogether impossible that Eliot is using the line for its sound alone.

### III

Eliot's awareness of the primal elements of rhythm and its ability to express "the last subtle nuances of civilized feeling" can be seen in an analysis of two of his works: Sweeney Agonistes and Ash-Wednesday. In the poems which precede Sweeney Agonistes, Sweeney is seen in various



postures. In Sweeney Erect we see Sweeney "straddled in the sun":

Sweeney addressed full length to shave  
 Broadbottomed, pink from nape to base,  
 Knows the female temperament  
 And wipes the suds around his face.

In Sweeney Among the Nightingales we see Sweeney sitting in a restaurant:

Apeneck Sweeney spreads his knees  
 Letting his arms hang down to laugh,  
 The zebra stripes along his jaw  
 Swelling to maculate giraffe.

Eliot's descriptions of Sweeney in these poems signify him clearly as the primal man, *erectus* both in the sexual and anthropological senses. In Sweeney Agonistes the rhythms are appropriate to Sweeney, the new barbarian, and his friends.

Morris Freedman in an article, "Jazz Rhythms and T. S. Eliot," notes how the jazz rhythm is based on the natural rhythm of words.<sup>20</sup> The words in Sweeney Agonistes are so ordered as to often present an insistent, monotonous repetition. In the Prologue the first lines of the conversation between Dusty and Doris are as follows:

Dusty: How about Pereira?  
 Doris: What about Pereira?  
 I don't care.  
 Dusty: You don't care!  
 Who pays the rent?  
 Doris: Yes he pays the rent  
 Dusty: Well some men don't and some men do  
 Some men don't and you know who.

The throbbing repetition is brought about by the stychomythic emphasis on question and exclamation. If the words did not have a social content, the lines might be nonsense. The rhythm forces itself upon the ear to the virtual exclusion of whatever meaning the lines may have.

There is a like insistence on the oral resonance of the word rather than on its visual symbol on the page. A stage direction stating "The telephone rings," would normally be expected, but in Sweeney Agonistes



we are given:

Telephone: Ting a ling ling  
Ting a ling ling.

We are impressed with the fact that the telephone is ringing: we do not merely observe that the telephone has rung. "Ting a ling ling" requires a movement between the eye and the voice. The "words" of the telephone ring are nonsense syllables--they express our idea of what a sound looks like. As nonsense syllables they help to fill out the set, to enhance or complete the rhythm of the whole.<sup>21</sup> "Ting a ling ling" takes on the vitality of a musical phrase. It becomes a functioning part of the pattern and has its place in the whole even though it is essentially nonsense.

The dancing rhythm continues through the cutting of the cards. In many of the lines there is an italicized word to show that the heavy beat of the line should fall there: "It might just as well be Sweeney." In other cases the rhymed word becomes the heaviest sound in the line.<sup>22</sup> When these words are used in close proximity they achieve a percussive or clangsing effect:

But Doris came home with a terrible chill  
No just a chill  
Oh I think it's only a chill.

The thrice repeated "chill" jars like a migraine. It is rhythmic and clamorous and there is no escaping it.

In a line like that spoken by Klipstein:

(I'm afraid I didn't quite catch your name--  
But I'm very pleased to meet you all the same)--

the first line is filled out by the caesura.<sup>23</sup> The technical use of this device is necessary to fill out the rhythm, and the line's rhythm rather than the meaning it might have is most important.

In the Agon the bitter irony of Eliot's rhythm becomes apparent.



After the cutting of the cards with its ominous portents, we have the same use of nonsense rhyme but the subject matter is of a more serious nature. Doris and Sweeney's sing-song conversation concerning the cannibal isle is a case in point:

Sweeney: I'll be the cannibal.  
 Doris: I'll be the missionary.  
 I'll convert you!  
 Sweeney: I'll convert you!  
 Into a stew.  
 A nice little, white little, missionary stew.

The scenario continues in the same manner with the rattling repetition of similar lines: "In a nice little, white little, soft little, tender little, / Juicy little, right little missionary stew." The lines however do not prepare us for Sweeney's statement:

Birth, and copulation, and death.  
 That's all the facts when you come to brass tacks:  
 Birth, and copulation, and death.  
 I've been born, and once is enough.  
 You don't remember, but I remember,  
 Once is enough.

The rhythm, with its heavy beats, is carried throughout Sweeney's revelation troubling his desire for metaphysical purity. As Freedman notes: "There is a kind of humor inherent in Eliot's jazz rhythms, which assumes an irony or grimness because of the contrast between the dancing movement of the rhythm and the seriousness of the content."<sup>24</sup>

The reader's attention is not allowed to dwell on Sweeney's speech, however, and the song following it redirects the reader's attention to the doggerel of:

Under the bam  
 Under the boo  
 Under the bamboo tree.

And even when the characters begin to discuss the most unsavoury aspects of the daily newspapers, the rhythm is still sustained:

Sweeney: I knew a man once did a girl in



Any man might do a girl in  
 Any man has to, needs to, wants to  
 Once in a lifetime, do a girl in.  
 Well he kept her there in a bath  
 With a gallon of lysol in a bath.

Again, the emphasis on the rhythm overshadows the meaning of the lines.

The Fragment of an Agon continues in the same manner and most suitably ends in a barrage of nonsense syllables. The last lines could most confidently be called the "voice" of the hand on the door.

Freedman says that Eliot uses jazz rhythms in Sweeney Agonistes to show destruction, and notes that Eliot never uses these rhythms in his later poetry for that purpose. He concludes: "The dialogue serves, therefore, almost exclusively to give us sharply several unpleasant characters, the monotonous reiteration of the jazz rhythms being ideally suited to this purpose, for they suggest a kind of music without meaning, percussion without point. The rhythm is not justified by the logic of the words as in conventional poetry."<sup>25</sup> Even though Sweeney insists, "I gotta use words when I talk to you," he points out that it is nothing if we do not understand. And in the case of Sweeney, if we do not understand his articulation or his experience, we can at least understand or feel the rhythm that keeps them remote from us.

In Ash-Wednesday, Eliot again uses a basic rhythm pattern to allow the reader to share in the understanding of the poem. The rhythm, in this case, is that of religious incantation. Rhythm is not used as a cover or a means of ironic comment as in Sweeney Agonistes; rather, the "logic of the words" is justified by the rhythm. Ash-Wednesday has a more catholic appeal, not simply because of its subject matter, but because of its rhythm which reaches back into the religious nature of man. The basic chant pattern is a part of the earliest tribalistic magic as well as the "Sanctus" of the high mass. The rhythm communicates because the rhythm



is in the blood, it does not have to be remembered.

Helen Gardner feels that the beginning of Ash-Wednesday marks a change of emphasis for Eliot. She quotes the lines:

Because I do not hope to turn again  
 Because I do not hope  
 Because I do not hope to turn  
 Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope.<sup>26</sup>

Of these she says: "One meaning of this, if not the principal one, is that from now on he will try to speak in his own voice, which will express himself with all his limitations, and try not to escape those limitations by imitating other poets."<sup>27</sup> Perhaps it can be argued that Eliot's limitations are precisely the poets that he does imitate and that he has found his strength in these limitations. F. O. Matthiessen, although his choice of Chaucer is perhaps unfortunate, has noted that Eliot's idea of tradition is conspicuously lacking--Chaucer, for instance, he says is only rarely mentioned, and then only by way of comparison with other writers.<sup>28</sup> Whatever bounds Eliot establishes, however, are not a limitation. They provide a necessary conciseness of reference since very little is left to whim. Eliot's criticism makes clear in which authors he finds his tradition. If this is the case, then his own voice, with his awareness of his tradition as well as his own age, is his greatest strength. His borrowing from other poets, because they are a part of his tradition, makes them a part of his strength. Miss Gardner's comment appears to border on an artificial distinction which impairs the understanding rather than enlightening it.

The emphasis in Ash-Wednesday is not on Eliot's use of voice, his own or that of other poets; rather, it is on the rhythms that he uses and the importance of their appeal.

The structure of the first poem is based on the rhetorical question which the poet attempts to answer:



Because I do not hope to turn again  
 Because I do not hope to know again  
 Because I know that time is always time  
 Because these wings are no longer wings to fly.

The rhetoric captures the reader's eye. He awaits the answer but there is to be no immediate resolution. The quiet supplication of the lines,

Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death  
 Pray for us now and at the hour of our death

echoes in the sensibility: we are brought up short. These two lines, part of the Ave Maria of the Roman Church, introduce the rhythm of prayer and interpose a quietness into the whole.

The second poem, in its middle stanza, continues this quiet rhythm. It is quoted here opposite to an equal number of lines from The Litany of The Blessed Virgin Mary. The opposition of the two shows how Eliot captured the incantatory rhythms of a liturgical service:

Lady of silences  
 Calm and distressed  
 Torn and most whole  
 Rose of memory  
 Rose of forgetfulness  
 Exhausted and life-giving  
 Worried reposeful  
 The single Rose  
 Is now the Garden  
 Where all loves end  
 Terminate torment  
 Of love unsatisfied  
 The greater torment  
 Of love satisfied  
 End of the endless  
 Journey to no end  
 Conclusion of all that  
 Is inconclusible  
 Speech without word and  
 Word of no speech  
 Grace to the Mother  
 For the Garden  
 Where all love ends.

Virgin most faithful,  
 Mirror of justice,  
 Seat of wisdom,  
 Cause of our joy,  
 Spiritual vessel,  
 Vessel of honour,  
 Singular vessel of devotion,  
 Mystical rose,  
 Tower of David,  
 Tower of Ivory,  
 House of Gold,  
 Ark of the covenant,  
 Gate of heaven,  
 Morning star,  
 Health of the sick,  
 Refuge of sinners,  
 Comforter of the afflicted,  
 Help of Christians,  
 Queen of Angels,  
 Queen of Patriarchs,  
 Queen of Prophets,  
 Queen of Apostles,  
 Queen of Martyrs,...<sup>29</sup>

Note that Eliot's litany ostensibly ends with the line, "Worried reposeful."

After this point Eliot forces the lines into the rhythm of the litany,



but even though the lines are forced, the rhythm can still carry them. The lines before the phrase "Worried reposeful" have attuned the ear to expect this rhythm. The voice and the eye are in correspondence--the length of the line necessarily, perhaps instinctively, triggers the incantatory rhythm.

The similar use of rhythms exists throughout the remaining four poems of Ash-Wednesday. From the translation of the cry "Domine non sum dignus":

Lord I am not worthy  
Lord I am not worthy

--the expression of humility prior to the Eucharist, to the counterpoint provided by the lines:

the Word unheard  
The Word without a word, the Word within  
The world and for the world,

the rhythm has sufficient dignity to sustain the intensity of the vision.

Hugh Kenner describes Ash-Wednesday as a "continuum in which the perceiving mind, intent on the quality of its own feelings constantly adjusts the scope and emphasis of its perceptions."<sup>30</sup> He also notes that the images are absorbed into literary tradition: "Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit of the garden," could represent any number of possible women from the Virgin Mary to Beatrice--in fact, any woman; she does not have to be substantial. He also points out that the subject matter of the poem is absorbed into states of feeling.

The "I" of the poem is only important insofar as the thought of this "I" is important; ultimately, the "I" and the voice are the same.<sup>31</sup> The "I" need not and should not be recognized as Eliot. Kenner not only recognizes the identity of the "I" and the voice but identifies them both with the "finite centre" of F.H. Bradley. The term "finite centre" is



perhaps best understood by its non-philosophic counterpart, the term "immediate experience." In Ash-Wednesday the three are one, perhaps a not altogether unintentional Christian parallel.

The rhythms used in Ash-Wednesday, its "compound of verbal suggestion,"<sup>32</sup> is as suitable to the materials of the poem as the jazz rhythms and the heavy beat of the line were to the second-hand world of Sweeney. Kenner says: "The function of the journey detailed in Ash-Wednesday is to arrive at a knowledge of the modes and possibilities of temporal redemption sufficient to our being deluded by a counterfeit of the negative way."<sup>33</sup> But whatever the various interpretations of Eliot's lines call upon for substantiation--Dante, the Catholic liturgy, Buddhism or literary tradition--the rhythms of the lines are native to the deeper parts of man's soul.



## CHAPTER IV

### VOICES IN THE WASTE LAND

'Nam Sibyllam quidem Cumis ego ipse oculis meis  
vidi in ampulla pendere, et cum illi pueri dicerent:  
*Σίβυλλα τί θέλεις* ; respondebat illa: *αποθανεῖν θέλω.*'

('For once I saw with my very own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her, "Sibyl, what do you want?" she answered, "I want to die."')

The epigraph for The Waste Land is taken from the Satyricon by Petronius. The original epigraph was to be, "The horror! The horror," from Conrad's Heart of Darkness.<sup>1</sup> It was Ezra Pound who convinced Eliot that a better epigraph could be found. He found it in Petronius.

The myth to which it refers concerns the Sibyl of Cumae who was to live as long as she held grains of sand in her hand. The line "I will show you fear in a handful of dust"(30), may be a reference to her situation. In Petronius she seems to represent the power of prophecy at its point of failure. She is essentially "bottled" prophecy. The Sibyl is compelled by her nature and function to answer all questions, but as she responds to the boys in Petronius' anecdote, she expresses only her desire to die. She is much like the Struldbriggs in Gulliver's Travels. The Sibyl expresses the only answer to life without meaning--death.

According to many critics, Eliot was expressing the "disillusionment of a generation." Moreover, The Waste Land became for them and others, a document of the life without meaning. As a result, much of the commentary tended to offer a sociological approach to its understanding. C. D. Lewis observed: "It gives an authentic impression of the mentality of educated people in the psychological slump that took place immediately



after the war. It makes us aware of the nervous exhaustion, the mental disintegration, the exaggerated self-consciousness, the boredom, the pathetic gropings after the fragments of a shattered faith--all these symptoms of the psychic disease which ravaged Europe as mercilessly as the Spanish influenza.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Lewis is only one of the many commentators whom Eliot answered in "Thoughts After Lambeth" (1931): "(I dislike the word 'generation', which has been a talisman for the last ten years; when I wrote a poem called The Waste Land some of the more approving critics said that I had expressed the 'disillusionment of a generation', which is nonsense. I may have expressed for them their own illusion of being disillusioned, but that did not form part of my intention.)"<sup>3</sup>

What is expressed in the epigraph is that the vehicle for prophecy, one of the mainstays of the Greek religion, is now only a figure of ridicule for young boys or an expression of a tale of wonder for the drunken Trimalchio. The Sibyl has little or no meaning outside this context; she cannot die and she is compelled to answer no matter what the question. She is the spirit of an age which has passed, she neither belongs at an orgy nor in Rome of the first century A.D. It is curious that Eliot chose this passage from Petronius, but more sense can be made of it if the Sibyl's voice is considered.

Petronius wrote in Latin yet the question is put to the Sibyl in Greek and she answers in that language. Perhaps Eliot felt a bond of unity with Petronius and his method. Petronius' motives, however, are too far removed for examination particularly in the fragmentary remains of the Satyricon. Eliot's motives are somewhat closer in the poem. The mixing of the Latin and the Greek takes its greater significance from a line at the end of Part V, What the Thunder said. The line is "Quando



fiam uti chelidon" (428), (When shall I be like the swallow). It is taken from the Pervigilium Veneris (the Vigil of Venus), an anonymous Latin poem. Although the line refers back to the story of Procne and the rape of Philomel, its major significance in reference to the epigraph, is in the use of the word "chelidon." The Latin word for swallow is "hirundo." Chelidon is the Roman transliteration of the Greek word for swallow, *χελιδών* (helithon); the "h" is heavily aspirated giving a "ch" sound as in Bach. In this line there is a similar mixing of Latin and Greek as there is in the epigraph. Eliot did not change either of the passages to achieve this mixture, but he did choose them.<sup>4</sup>

Eliot's attitudes toward the classics are well known. In The Classics and The Man of Letters, he states that "the maintenance of classical education is essential to the maintenance of the continuity of English Literature."<sup>5</sup> There is some evidence which may provide a clue to Eliot's choice of the word "chelidon" in the line taken from the Pervigilium Veneris. An essay, "Virgil and The Christian World" (1951), gives Eliot's view of the importance of the Greek language for poetry: "I still think it a much greater language: a language which has never been surpassed as a vehicle for the fullest range and the finest shades of thought and feeling."<sup>6</sup> The line "Quando fiam uti chelidon," perhaps carries the necessary shade of "thought and feeling." It is one of "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (430). The Greek in the passage from the Satyricon also expresses the most thematically important part of the fragment, *ἀνθεκεῖν θέλω* (I want to die). The choice of these lines appears to be more than a happy accident. The first is concerned with prophecy and the perversion of religious values, and the second with love. In their respective positions they provide bounds for the poem. They also point to the wideness of Eliot's scope of



reference. The Grail legend may provide the thematic detail for the poem, but not at the expense of eliminating many other facets of disparate experience.

Kenner observes of the two lines,

These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why the Ille fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe, (430-431)

that there is a closer parallel between Hieronymo's plan and The Waste Land than one would first believe. Hieronymo says:

Each one of us  
Must act his part in unknown languages,  
That it may breed the more variety:  
As you, my lord, in Latin, I in Greek,  
You in Italian, and for because I know  
That Bellimperia hath practised the French,  
In courtly French shall all her phrases be.

All the languages mentioned, save the Greek, according to Kenner, are in the list of shored fragments.<sup>7</sup> However, if we accept "chelidon" as a Greek word, latinized as it may appear, then the pattern is complete. It is not unlikely that such is the case, particularly with Eliot.

The poet of the Pervigilium Veneris, in his use of the demotic, if "chelidon" can be called demotic rather than classical, provides a parallel with Eliot. Eliot mixes the classical with the demotic throughout The Waste Land, not only in his use of language but in the majesty of his imagery.<sup>8</sup> In A Game of Chess, the measured splendor of the beginning is contrasted with the conversation in the pub which ends it. The comparison is not only between the two levels of life but also between the two levels of language. That there exists no moral difference between the two, on either level, provides the key to their understanding. Eliot is still, in a sense, experimenting with language and voice. His own voice as well as the voices of other poets comprise the poem. He is extremely conscious of his limitations; he has not yet found the language which will exhaust



all his possibilities, but he is working towards it. The use of other voices is a manifestation of this limitation, and he is often more conscious of the other voices, perhaps at this stage he has to be, than he is of his own style. The style, then, is sometimes disjointed; the thought, however, is not.

Tiresias is at the centre of the poem. He exists there structurally in his appearance in the middle of The Fire Sermon, and he exists also at the centre of the sexual focus. As Tiresias has "foresuffered all/Enacted on this same divan or bed" (243-244), he is also the voice of the Sibyl asking for death, for release from the bonds of perpetual life. In him, or in his sexual duality, Marie and the hyacinth girl are fully realized. The experiences of all the women in the Waste Land are essentially one: all share in the hollow splendor of Cleopatra and the desertion of Dido by Aeneas: all witness,

The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king  
So rudely forced. (99-100)

Similarly, all undergo the fate of Philomel and Procne; they all suffer and through their suffering are moved to some action, whether it is understood or not. Marie races down a mountain on a sled: the hyacinth girl returns from the garden: Philomel sings "'Jug Jug' to dirty ears" (103), and the typist,

...smooths her hair with automatic hand  
And puts a record on the gramaphone. (205-206)

"Quando fiam uti chelidon" (428) echoes the fate of Procne. Kenner notes: "The Pervigilium Veneris is another rite, popular, post-pagan. pre-Christian, welcoming the spring and inciting to love: 'Cras amet qui numquam amavit'; he who has never loved, let him love tomorrow; secular love, but its trajectory leads, via the swallow aloft."<sup>9</sup> The direction



that this suffering should move people is "aloft"; however, in the barrenness of the Waste Land world the movement is of the "automatic hand," and it is moved by pain and resignation, not by joy.

Curiously, in his choice of an epigraph, Eliot became a prophet. The word "prophet" is qualified, as Eliot qualifies it in his essay on Virgil, by the term "inspiration": "But if the word 'inspiration' is to have any meaning, it must mean just this, that the speaker or writer is uttering something which he does not wholly understand--or which he may even misinterpret when the inspiration has departed from him."<sup>10</sup> It can only be called inspiration which makes valid Eliot's reference to the caged Sibyl applicable, more than twenty years later, to the imprisoned Pound, caged at Pisa.

## II

In the epigraph Eliot dedicates The Waste Land to Ezra Pound as "il miglior fabbro" (the better maker). The words are used to describe Arnaut Daniel to Dante and are spoken by Guido Guinicelli. Eliot said of the tribute: "...the phrase, not only as used by Dante, but as quoted by myself, had a precise meaning. I did not mean to imply that Pound was only that: but I wished at that moment to honour the technical mastery and critical ability manifest in his own work, which had also done so much to turn The Waste Land from a jumble of good and bad passages into a poem."<sup>11</sup> This points out two facets of Eliot's use of quotation: the words as used by their original author, and their meaning as used by Eliot.

For example, the epigraph to The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock is spoken by Count Guido da Montefeltro. In answer to a request for information he speaks to Dante from the middle of the flames: "But since



from this abyss, if I hear true,/None ever came alive, I have no fear/Of infamy, but give thee answer due."<sup>12</sup> As Montefeltro is a voice within a flame, Prufrock is a voice within a "moving zone of consciousness."<sup>13</sup> Prufrock leads us through his own personal Inferno:

Let us go then, you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky.

The voices in Prufrock are heard like the voices in the Inferno and the Purgatorio which cry out to Virgil and Dante from behind walls, from pits and from flames. The population of these nether regions are shades. When Dante tries to embrace them he finds that they are not substantial, that they are only voices.

In Prufrock the passage,

In the room the women come and go  
Talking of Michaelangelo,

echoes as a refrain throughout the poem. It adds an eerie counterpoint, a flash of memory perhaps, as Prufrock moves through his world. The questions force themselves upon him--they appear to have their own voices:

Do I dare  
Disturb the universe?

The question, of seemingly cosmic importance, occupies a mere instant in time, and the feeling remains that the "I" referred to has nothing at all to do with Prufrock. All the questions that are asked of Prufrock take place in an instant. There is no time for reflection, only time for another question.

When Prufrock does appear to reflect upon his condition, he gives an endless list of possible meanings:

I am no prophet--and here's no great matter;  
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,  
And in short, I was afraid.



His consciousness is an inclusive one; it ricochets back and forth like a charged particle in a vacuum leaving a mark at each point that it strikes. Like the voice in the flame, and apparently close to Eliot's feeling for what Dante meant, Prufrock wishes:

To say: 'I am Lazarus, come back from the dead,  
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all'.

The Lazarus theme is one of Eliot's favourites. Prufrock says:

I know the voices dying with a dying fall  
Beneath the music from a farther room.

Whether it is the room where the "women come and go" we are not told. As it is for Prufrock, it is also for us--it does not matter. The lines continue tracing the workings of Prufrock's consciousness, recreating the tensions that exist there. Prufrock muses as an "attendant lord," but the lines of his musing are immediately followed by the lines:

I grow old...I grow old...  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

These lines, with their simple rhyme, have a power far beyond their appearance. They deal a glancing blow to the sensibility; they drive deep into the soul to bring back the possibilities of "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season," expressed in Gerontion. They are a jocular attempt at coming to terms with one's mortality; the jocularity, however, does not succeed--one might question whether it was meant to.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

In the last line Eliot completes the circle he began with Dante's lines. Montefeltro, the voice of a shade, not a real person, is echoed by the voices in Prufrock. Human voices wake us to drowning. Throughout Prufrock's world, whose limits are the limits of his own consciousness, he moves with little certainty. Like Dante he hears unknown voices:



I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.  
I do not think that they will sing to me.

The dream vision (the ending of the poem perhaps allows the use of this phrase) must reach its conclusion, at least for Prufrock. Where Prufrock leads us we cannot know: where he has taken us we can only guess. For Prufrock, and perhaps for all that he signifies, "It is impossible to say just what I mean!" The answer to Prufrock and to the way in which he moves in his world may lie in Eliot's use of Dante: "The Divine Comedy expresses everything in the way of emotion, between depravity's despair and the beatific vision, that man is capable of experiencing. It is therefore a constant reminder to the poet, of the obligation to explore, to find words for the inarticulate, to capture those feelings which people can hardly even feel, because they have no words for them; and at the same time, a reminder that the explorer beyond the frontiers of ordinary consciousness will only be able to return and report to his fellow citizens, if he has all the time a firm grasp upon the realities with which they are already acquainted."<sup>14</sup>

### III

For Eliot, Dante is more than an influence; he is a presence. In everything that Eliot writes about Dante there is a similar tone of conviction. Witness his statement on Dante's selection of the damned: "It reminds us that Hell is not a place but a state; that a man is damned or blessed in the creatures of his imagination as well as in the men who have actually lived; and that Hell, though a state, is a state which can only be thought of, and perhaps only experienced, by the projection of sensory images; and that the resurrection of the body has perhaps a deeper meaning than we understand."<sup>15</sup> Dante, then, represents not only a part



of Eliot's tradition but also a facet of his inner strength. Prufrock experiences Hell "by the projection of sensory images." The personae of The Waste Land experience it in a similar manner.

The voice of Dante echoes in The Burial of The Dead:

A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many  
 I had not thought death had undone so many  
 Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled  
 And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (62-65)

There is the same expression of surprise in Eliot as there is in Dante at the numbers of the dead. The "undone" represent the souls too negative for heaven or hell--they populate the Waste Land world. In 1950 Eliot wrote: "Readers of my Waste Land will perhaps remember that my vision of my city clerks trooping over London Bridge from the railway station to their offices evoked the reflection 'I had not thought death had undone so many'; and in another place I deliberately modified a line by altering it--'sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled.' And I gave the references in my notes, in order to make the reader who recognized my allusion, know that I meant him to recognize it, and know that he would have missed the point if he did not recognize it."<sup>16</sup>

In The Fire Sermon the lines,

Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew  
 Undid me, (293-294)

come from those spoken by Lady Piety in Canto V of the Purgatorio:

Remember me, that am called Piety  
 Siena made me and Maremma undid me. (133-134)

Eliot changes the names of the places and the deed. Lady Piety was the victim of sudden and unprepared death. The Thames daughter undergoes a seemingly expected seduction:

By Richmond I raised my knees.  
 Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe. (294-295)



The tone of resignation reveals an attitude which the song of the second daughter echoes, "What should I resent?" (299). In the *Waste Land* there is no commitment of one person to another, no lasting bonds of attachment. The meeting between the typist and the clerk serves as a model for all relationships in the "Unreal City."

The last line which expresses the voice of Dante appears in the last stanza of What the Thunder said--"Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina" (427). The passage from which this line is taken is the passage in which Dante allows the voice of Arnaut Daniel to speak in his native Provençal:

"Ara vos prec, per aquella valor  
que vos guida al son de l'escalina,  
sovegna vos a temps de ma dolor."

Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina.<sup>17</sup>

("And so I pray you, by that virtue  
which leads you to the topmost stair,  
be mindful in due time of my pain."

Then dived he back into that fire which refines them.)

Eliot has used this verse from the Purgatorio more than any other. He titled his third book of poetry Ara Vos Prec. "Sovegna vos" appears in Ash-Wednesday IV. "Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina" appears untranslated in The Waste Land. Eliot renders the line in the original for very good reasons. First, the line has a simplicity of statement which could not be improved upon; second, he wants it recognized as a line from Dante, and last, perhaps for its sound and its existence at this point as a fragment.<sup>18</sup> There is more to be said of its meaning later.

IV

F. R. Leavis sees the disjointedness and borrowing exhibited by The Waste Land as symptomatic of a moral breakdown: "These characteristics



reflect the present state of civilization. The traditions and the cultures have mingled, and the historical imagination makes the past contemporary; no one tradition can digest so great a variety of materials, and the result is a breakdown of forms and the irrevocable loss of that sense of absolute-ness which seems necessary to a robust culture.<sup>19</sup> Eliot himself might have questioned the desirability of a "robust culture" on these terms. Eliot did not try to establish the poem as a metaphysical unity; it does not show the "severance from all beliefs"<sup>20</sup> that some have claimed. It contains all the outward trappings of a culturally inherited religion, whether it be the vegetation ceremonies examined in Frazer's Golden Bough or revealed religion in the form of lines from the Bible or the Upanishads. The poem's unity is in its fragments and the meaning of their juxtaposition and counterpoint. The emphasis is on the outer trappings because the inner core, that which gives life--the soul, semen, rain--is missing and barrenness and sterility prevail.

In each section of the poem the voices speak from point to point. Their dialogue creates a drama within each part. Each part is in turn engaged in dialogue with every other part. There is often conflict between the voices, sometimes harmony. Eliot says in his essay on Philip Massinger that "The poetic drama must have an emotional unity, let the emotion be whatever you like. It must have a dominant tone; and if this be strong enough, the most heterogeneous emotions may be made to reinforce it."<sup>21</sup> Though The Waste Land is not a poetic drama in the same sense as Murder in The Cathedral, it nevertheless presents an emotional unity and a dominant tone. A summary of each of the sections of the poem serves to illustrate how this is brought about by Eliot's use of voice.

In the mixing of memory and desire in The Burial of The Dead, the



past and the present are brought together, a situation expressed in the opening lines of Burnt Norton:

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past.(I)

The voice in the Hofgarten, "Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch"(12) rattles against Wagner's "Oed' und leer das Meer"(42). Not only does Wagner's line represent the report of the sailors to the dying Tristan but also the fact that in 1922, after "the war to end all wars," the sea was desolate and empty. The dual reference of the single line heightens its dramatic effect. Similarly, there is a tension between the voices of revealed religion and that of Madame Sosostris and her "wicked pack of cards."<sup>22</sup> Consider the implications of "I will show you fear in a handful of dust"(30) in comparison to "Fear death by water"(55). Both have a multiplicity of reference: both are paradoxical: both are ironic. They are essentially similar yet they are actually poles apart. The fact that we have lost the ability to discern the difference between them is perhaps the symptom of a greater loss which sustains them both.

The "Unreal city" is Baudelaire's :

'Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,  
'Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant.'<sup>23</sup>

Eliot says: "I knew what that meant, because I had lived it before I knew that I wanted to turn it into verse on my own account."<sup>24</sup> In the combination of this line from Baudelaire and the voice of Dante from the Inferno, we are brought into the inferno of the Waste Land with its buried corpse which could be buried memory. Saint Mary Woolnoth chimes "With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine"(68). The bell signifies the start of the work day, and also triggers the rememberance that Christ died in the ninth hour. The combination of reference, with its ironic contrast, is



typical of Eliot's use of imagery. The voices of The Burial of The Dead bear witness to the waste which surrounds. They set the scene for the rest of the poem by reinforcing the feeling that life in the Waste Land is a living death, and they foreshadow, in their constant references to vegetation, a hope that only through death can we achieve life.

V

The first stanza of A Game of Chess depends on material from Shakespeare, Virgil, Pope and Ovid. There is the invocation of a love which is somehow changed, corrupted or forced. Cleopatra represents love for love's sake. Belinda, from Pope's The Rape of The Lock, is not present as a voice but the following lines evoke her presence:

The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,  
From satin cases poured in rich profusion.  
In vials of ivory and coloured glass  
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,  
Unguent, powdered, or liquid.(84-86)

The vision of Belinda at her dressing table is an echo, in Eliot's sense of that word, which is brought about by his description of Cleopatra. The love affair between Dido and Aeneas is also entered into the catalogue. As Allen Tate believes, The Waste Land, and particularly A Game of Chess, presents a scientific view of love.<sup>25</sup> The "sylvan scene" does not look out upon a world of nymphs and shepherds, but:

The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king  
So rudely forced.(99-100)

Her "inviolable voice" is born of violation; Suffering produces action. The myth, however, is made new:

And still she cried, and still the world pursues,  
'Jug Jug' to dirty ears.(103-104)



The tense change is most significant. As Kenner has remarked, who can think the nightingale's song beautiful when they realize the cost.<sup>26</sup> The rape of Philomel continues through each day: it is a myth in a constant state of renewal. The aesthetic of sex is absent.

The middle section of A Game of Chess shifts to a psychological focus in which the reader can watch the disintegration of a mind:

'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me.  
 'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.  
 'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
 'I never know what you are thinking. Think.' (111-114)

The answers to these questions are singular in their calmness, almost paradoxically calm in comparison to the panic in the questioner's voice. To the final question, "'What shall we ever do?'" (134), he can only answer:

The hot water at ten.  
 And if it rains, a closed car at four.  
 And we shall play a game of chess,  
 Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door. (135-138)

The game of chess, both here and in the title, refers to Middleton's Women Beware Women in which a game of chess provides a visual explanation of the seduction taking place in the next room. The answer to the question is presented in terms of possibilities; there is no certainty.

The last movement consists of a conversation in the pub concerning the details of Lil and Albert's marriage, the money for her new teeth and her abortion.<sup>27</sup> The call of the barkeep, "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME" (141), adds a sense of urgency to the conversation. The dialogue does not end for there can be no resolution; rather, it slips silently suicidal into Ophelia's farewell words, "Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night" (172).

What is most remarkable in A Game of Chess is the interrelation



of the parts. Despite what appear to be surface differences between the subject matter and the time relation of the three scenes, they are held together strongly by their emotional unity and common tone. There is no divisive difference among the women of any of the scenes; Cleopatra is as culpable as Lil, her perfumes are similar to the chemist's potion. In each scene, the concern is with the science rather than the aesthetic of love. The first presents the rape of Philomel; the second, the impending doom of "a closed car at four" with its boring regularity; the third, with Lil's attempts to keep Albert at bay. The land is sterile and love is sterile; and the sterility applies not only to the women. In A Game of Chess, woman is a symbol for all man.<sup>28</sup> The voices of A Game of Chess: Cleopatra, Dido, Philomel and Ophelia all have the same tale to tell.

## VI

In The Fire Sermon the land has not changed:

The wind  
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed. (174-175)

The Fisher King, in his second appearance, stands fishing, "On a winter evening round behind the gashouse" (190). The voices tell us only of the images of sterility, of the perversion of religious values, of the perversion of love:

Jug jug jug jug jug jug  
So rudely forc'd  
Tereu. (204-206)

The scene between the typist and the clerk is as scientific as the rape of Philomel. There is no love, only lust. The passage opens:

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back  
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits  
Like a taxi throbbing waiting, (215-217)



and ends:

She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramaphone. (255-256)

The scene is structured on these two mechanical images. Through the observation of Tiresias, a participant in three myths, we see the Waste Land myth come to life, fertilized by a dry seed and nurtured in a sterile womb. Hugh Kenner discusses Tiresias' role in the three myths and his possible relevance to The Waste Land:

In Oedipus Rex, sitting "by Thebes below the wall" he knew why, and as a consequence of what violent death and what illicit amour, the pestilence had fallen on the unreal city, but declined to tell. In the Odyssey he "walked among the lowest of the dead" and evaded predicting Odysseus' death by water; the encounter was somehow necessary to Odysseus' homecoming, and Odysseus was somehow satisfied with it, and did get home, for a while. In the Metamorphoses he underwent a change of sex for watching the coupling of snakes: presumably the occasion on which he "foresuffered" what is tonight "enacted on this same divan or bed."<sup>29</sup>

From Tiresias, the focus moves to the river where the voice of Conrad, from the Heart of Darkness, echoes forth:

Red sails  
Wide  
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar. (270-272)

The songs of the Thames daughters, each more pitiful than the other, voice their sense of loss. The river no longer feeds the land, and the daughters' cry of,

Weialala leia  
Wallala leialala (277-278)

carries across the Thames. There is a slow movement from the seduction of the first, "Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe" (295), to the realization that

'On Margate sands.  
I can connect  
Nothing with nothing.  
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.  
My people humble people who expect  
Nothing.' (300-305)



The "la la" which punctuates the end of the passage offers the final note of lamentation.

Of St. Augustine and Buddha, Eliot remarks blandly: "The collocation of these two representatives of eastern and western asceticism, as the culmination of this part of the poem, is not an accident."<sup>30</sup> The fire refers to the ceaseless agitation to which life in time is subject, as well as the purging fire of suffering which refines us. As Eliot has noted, the souls in Purgatory undergo purgation because they wish to suffer--to suffer is their only hope.<sup>31</sup>

In The Fire Sermon we are asked to listen perhaps more than in any other passage. The wind is "unheard"; we await "The sound of horns and motors"(197); the nightingale's song "pursues" us still. The sounds of what appears to be a slow awakening to memory call to the ear:

O City city, I can sometimes hear  
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,  
The pleasant whining of a mandoline  
And a clatter and a chatter from within.(259-262)

The songs of the Thames daughters desire to be heard. The voices, like the nymphs, are departed, or perhaps they are only hushed:

Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,  
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.(283-284)

If we listen closely, we hear the bones "Rattled by the rat's foot only"(195). If there is to be any hope, it is only through the fire, as in Dante, that the other side can be reached.

## VII

Phlebas is caught in the paradoxical nature of water: he is drowned; he is cleansed. The statement is short and complete.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps also we are asked to recall: "Ulysses in hell was encased in a tongue of flame,



death by water having in one instance secured not the Baptismal renunciation of the Old Adam, but an eternity of fire. Were there some simple negative formula for dealing with the senses, suicide would be the sure way to re-generation.<sup>33</sup> Whether baptism or rebirth is possible for Phlebas is left untold.

## VIII

According to Eliot's note, the first part of What the Thunder said employs three themes: "the journey to Emmaus, the approach to the Chapel Perilous...and the present decay of eastern Europe."<sup>34</sup> There is a curious mixture of betrayed Christianity and Buddhism, as well as the continuing thread of the Grail Legend:

He who was living is now dead  
We who were living are now dying  
With a little patience.(328-330)

Christ, borne into the hands of his enemies, is not recognized after his resurrection:

I do not know whether a man or a woman  
--But who is that on the other side of you?(364-365)

There appears to be no hope for now the baptismal font is empty, and there is no promise of rain, only "dry sterile thunder."

Everything has dried up: spirituality and civilization:

Who are those hooded hordes swarming  
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth.(368-369)

As Rome fell to the Huns, all civilizations fall:

Falling towers  
Jerusalem Athens Alexandria  
Vienna London  
Unreal.(373-376)

The movement is not only in terms of historical time but also in terms of geographical proximity. The closing circle becomes smaller and smaller.<sup>35</sup>



The decay is inherent in the roots, the "Murmur of maternal lamentation" (367).

The Waste Land is a land of spiritual and temporal decay. Even in the night of supernatural terror in the Chapel Perilous:

There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.  
It has no windows, and the door swings,  
Dry bones can harm no one. (388-390)

When the cock speaks there is the awe-full realization of cowardice, a realization that few people could ever reach. The cock is the precursor of salvation for mankind. There is also another possible reference, as B. C. Southam points out, that of the cock as the "trumpet of the morn," signifying that all ghosts and spirits must cease their earthly wandering. The chapel is now empty of nightmares and apparitions.<sup>36</sup>

The thunder that speaks "over Himavant" is wet thunder, not the "dry sterile thunder without rain." The gods, demons and men approach Prajupati. To each of their questions he answers "DA." "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata" are their respective interpretations of what "DA" means.<sup>37</sup> Like all religious teaching, understanding is arrived at through interpretation. Whether the understanding is the truth is unknown; thus, man must cling to interpretations of religious experience which offer no certainty. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, Prajupati emerges as a monotheistic god. Although Eliot does not broach this matter, the gap between eastern and western asceticism is very small indeed.

What have we given?

The awful daring of a moment's surrender  
Which an age of prudence can never retract. (401-403)

Was there any more to give? "Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison" (414)--both in the east and in the west the soul is the prisoner of the body, only death, "nightfall," offers the possibility of release. Further, the only way to approach release in life is through control: self control



(Christianity) or control by the life process (Buddhism). They are essentially the same, not only in the end that they seek but in their manner of travel:

Burning burning burning burning  
 O Lord Thou pluckest me out  
 O Lord Thou pluckest me. (308-310)

The asceticism, however, is only part of the answer. The lines, which deal with control, unconsciously echo another possibility, perhaps a more important one:

The boat responded  
 Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar  
 The sea was calm, your heart would have responded  
 Gaily, when invited, beating obedient  
 To controlling hands. (418-422)

The reference may concern the rescue of Eugene Wrayburn by Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend by Charles Dickens. The following lines refer to Lizzie: "A sure touch of her old practised hand, a sure step of her old practised foot, a sure light balance of her body, and she was in the boat. A quick glance of her practised eye showed her, even through the deep dark shadow, the sculls in a rack against the red-brick garden wall. Another moment, and she had cast off (taking the line with her), and the boat had shot out into the moonlight, and she was rowing down the stream as never other woman rowed on English water."<sup>38</sup> Lizzie wished to deny this side of her upbringing, yet her ability to handle a boat becomes the means of saving Eugene's life. Lizzie accepts the fact of her bond with the river, and her ability to work with the elements preserves Eugene.

The following lines appear to point to a gentility, a harmony, that has not been visible previously in the Waste Land:

...your heart would have responded  
 Gaily, when invited, beating obedient  
 To controlling hands. (420-422)



The answer for the inhabitants of the Waste Land is control, for only through control can love be achieved, and love may provide the answer. There is only a hint of this possibility, but it is a possibility nevertheless. "Shall I at least set my lands in order?"(425) could be an echo of "Set my love in order, O thou who lovest me," the words spoken by Jacopone da Todi, the Italian poet, placed by Dante at the head of the Purgatorio.<sup>39</sup> If such is the case, it provides more evidence for the previous possibility concerning the reference to Our Mutual Friend.

In the last stanza Eliot combines fragments from the Grail Legend, a children's nursery rhyme, Dante's Purgatorio, El Desdichado by Gerard de Nerval, The Spanish Tragedy by Thomas Kyd, and the voice of the thunder from the Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad. It has been explained as a senseless conglomerate of borrowings, a suitable ending to The Waste Land. There have also been interpretations questioning whether the poem exhibits any progression. F. R. Leavis, for instance, feels that the poem ends where it began: "The unity the poem aims at is that of an inclusive consciousness: the organization it achieves as a work of art is of the kind that has been illustrated; an organization that may, by analogy, be called musical. It exhibits no progression:

I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

--the thunder brings no rain to revive the Waste Land, and the poem ends where it began."<sup>40</sup>

The question of a progression, however, is a diversion. One could do no better than Hugh Kenner who explicates the meaning of the lines in their context in The Waste Land. Within that context, the lines compress all that has come before them into a few words. The lines take on the appearance of a cinematic flashback through memory, the dream vision of



a resting knight. "Like the Knight in the Chapel Perilous," says Kenner, "we are to ask what these relics mean; and the answers will lead us into far recesses of tradition."<sup>41</sup> All the fragments are a part of the tradition, but perhaps the line to be stressed is "Poi s'asconde nel foco che gli affina," not only for its meaning but for what it explains, what it offers. It explains the soul's desire for purification and it offers a hope, previously absent, that redemption is a possibility. Only the poet's interpretation of "Damyata" approaches this view, though, as with Paolo and Francesca, love does not necessarily offer salvation.

## IX

Throughout The Waste Land, the voices speak and the reader listens, both at the conscious and subliminal levels. Tiresias speaks as the central persona of the poem; he sees "the substance of the poem." He understands what he sees and we are told that he understands. The movement in Tiresias is from the eye to the voice. The voices, those which are explicitly noted by Eliot as well as those which appear as unconscious echoes, hold the poem together. Baudelaire's "Fourmillante cité" and Shakespeare's "Those are pearls that were his eyes" have an added dimension of meaning in providing a mechanical linkage among several sections of the poem. The underlying tones are those of ordinary conversation. Even in those passages which approach the dramatic, the language remains conspicuously simple. As a poem, The Waste Land illustrates Eliot's definition of the auditory imagination. It penetrates "far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling" and "fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality." Often the poem shows the



conscious working of Eliot's memory, the debts he feels he owes to his tradition, the responsibility, to use Pound's phrase, to "make it new." The voices speak out from the Waste Land as they spoke out to Dante and Virgil from behind the walls of Hell and Purgatory. They stand out from the ruin and decay; they insist on being heard.

The Waste Land is a pilgrimage: the Grail legend is a myth for the search for purity, a search that occupies everyone. If we have lost the ability to discriminate because of the complexity of the modern world, then we must re-make the myth. Eliot's world, at the time of The Waste Land, is not our world. His genius is that he can give us a sense of his age. Whether the poem exhibits a progression, whether it was ever meant to, simply does not matter. The worth of a pilgrimage is an individual matter. Only Eliot could have answered his questions, if they were answerable. What The Waste Land leaves it leaves unsaid--a list of perpetual possibilities.



## CHAPTER V

### THE VOICE IN FOUR QUARTETS

A.F. Beringause says of the end of The Waste Land that "Eliot now knows how to reach the truth. The key to the door behind which lies immortality is mysticism."<sup>1</sup> Though such a statement misrepresents Eliot's intentions some such explanation is often thought to point the direction in which Eliot moves in the Four Quartets. Similarly, the attempt is often made to show that the Quartets are the crowning glory of Eliot's "post-conversion" phase. Both points of view are limited, for as The Waste Land does, the poems of the Four Quartets call upon a wide range of experience and apparently disparate knowledge. As a result, their unity is necessarily complex; paradoxically however, Eliot manages the complexity with surprising simplicity.

Though in the Four Quartets Eliot uses quotation to nearly the same extent as he does in The Waste Land, he uses it in a different way. The reader is neither enlightened nor led astray by notes which, though they point to a line's source, throw a shroud of mystery over its significance. As Pound observed, the notes do not make any difference to the reading of the poem. Four Quartets does not provide us with such an encumbrance. With the exception of a short note under the title of The Dry Salvages, explaining the source of the title and the meaning of a "groaner," notes are altogether absent.

The genesis of the Four Quartets, though not as interesting as that of The Waste Land, is worthy of record. Burnt Norton first appeared as the concluding poem to the volume Collected Poems 1909-1935. According



to Eliot, there were some fragments left over and deleted from the final version of Murder in the Cathedral: "However these fragments stayed in my mind, and gradually I saw a poem shaping itself round them: in the end it came out as 'Burnt Norton'."<sup>2</sup> East Coker first appeared in the pages of the New English Weekly in the spring of 1940. It was only with the writing of East Coker that Eliot began to see the Quartets as a set of four. The Dry Salvages and Little Gidding were published in September 1941 and December 1942 respectively, both by Faber.

It is possible that the Quartets written after Burnt Norton, though they continue the patterns established by that poem, are built to some extent on the feelings that Eliot expressed in The Idea of a Christian Society (1939): "I believe that there must be many persons who, like myself, were deeply shaken by the events of September 1938; persons to whom that month brought a profounder realization of a general plight...a feeling of humiliation which seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance and amendment; a doubt of the validity of civilization...."<sup>3</sup> This comment does not mean that the Quartets are to be read as a social document; the personal content and the personal involvement in the poems are too large to say that it expresses the "disillusionment of a generation."

The personal element of Four Quartets could be described as transparent biography. The "I" in the poem does not necessarily identify the poet. The poet in the poetry, speaking of the difficulties of writing, of trying "to purify the dialect of the tribe," is Eliot and yet he is not Eliot. As Hugh Kenner remarks: "The mimicry of the dynamics of personal intercession, the Voice moving from exposition through intimacy to reminiscence, passing through lyric, expending itself in overheard meditation, without ever allowing us to intuit the impurities of personal



presence, transforms at last into self-sustaining technique the anonymity which Eliot always devised, by one means or another, as the indispensable condition of his poetry."<sup>4</sup>

The use of voice in Four Quartets is the use of the Voice. Whereas Eliot worked by accumulation in The Waste Land, bringing the voices together in a poetic Babel, he now has mastery over the voices and can combine them within a pattern, a pattern which had its beginning in The Waste Land. The lines no longer have the fractured appearance of quotation heavily end-stopped. Quotation, when it is used, fits precisely into the pattern that the Voice overrides. When a quotation is used for linkage as in, "With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling" from The Cloud of Unknowing, the transition from section to section is smooth and complete. More than by quotation, Eliot works by echo in Four Quartets. For some of the echoes a precise parallel can be found, or a possibility of a further reference, or a multiplicity of meaning; however, for many there are no tools with which an identification could be made. For these there often remains the hint of a similarity of tone or the perception of a similar ordering of experience, a flash on "the kingfisher's wing."

A component of Eliot's ability to order experience in the way that he does in the Quartets is the rhythm of his lines. According to Kenner, the new rhythm first appears in Journey of the Magi, and moves through Choruses from 'The Rock' to Murder in the Cathedral.<sup>5</sup> This new rhythm depends primarily on the four-stress line. The opening passage from Burnt Norton illustrates:

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.



The first two lines present the pattern to which the lines normally conform. The third line shows a variation common to the Quartets; at times, the lines range freely between three and six stresses, but four is the basic number. The rhythm reinforces the thought expressed by placing the stress on the important words in the line. "Time" with its qualifying "present" and "past" are all stressed in the first line. The poet, as T. E. Hulme noted, is like the snake charmer, he can make his words stand on end and hit you. "The development of this measure," notes Kenner, "was Eliot's last feat of technical innovation."<sup>6</sup> He continues: "To devise a measure is to devise a voice, and the appropriate range of expressive content the Voice implies. Of this Voice we may remark first of all its selflessness; it is Old Possum's last disappearing-trick. No persona, Prufrock, Gerontion, Tiresias or the Magus, is any longer needed."<sup>7</sup>

Four Quartets move more dramatically than The Waste Land. Each poem has the unity of emotion and the dominant tone which Eliot demanded of poetic drama, but unlike The Waste Land, there is a wave-like motion of intensity when the poems are read in their five-part structure. The "wounded surgeon" section of East Coker is considered, by many commentators, to be a low point as is most of The Dry Salvages. When you examine the imagery of these sections you are left with nothing more than the satisfaction of having done so. On the other hand, the Dantesque passage in Little Gidding is almost universally considered a poetic triumph. The development of feeling, however, can be traced through the different sections of the poems, even through those lacking in intensity. All the voices and all the echoes move freely throughout the unity of the Voice. Each movement of each poem renews a theme or an emotion, and though each movement is interrelated within the individual poem, the passages have a



parallel in their counterparts in each of the Quartets.

The Voice in the Quartets can be tentatively defined in terms of its awareness. It is aware of its roots: its familial and cultural roots as well as its tradition. The awareness of its tradition, as in The Waste Land, consists not only of the borrowed and echoed voices of other poets, but of its own voice and its own contributions to its tradition. In its search for answers it pays its debts to Bradley, Heraclitus and the Christian Neo-Platonists. It attempts to perceive its own reality, but it can only approximate the answers. Within the context of the poem it can only arrive at possible explanations. The transparency of memory is explored as well as the relation of memory to "our first world." As conscious as it is of the need to cleanse itself, of the fact that "humility is endless," it is conscious of the shortcomings of language as the vehicle for poetic expression. Most of all, it seems, the Voice, in its lyric fourth movements, is aware of the immediacy of God.

## II

The titles of each of the Quartets provide an "objective correlative" for the working of the poet's memory.<sup>8</sup> Each one, in turn, provides some vital insight for the Voice, an insight which the pattern of the poem explicates. Burnt Norton alludes to a mansion at Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire which Eliot visited in 1934.<sup>9</sup> East Coker is a village in Somerset, the ancestral home of the Eliots. Andrew Eliot emigrated from here in 1667 to continue the Eliot name in America. In East Coker the Voice returns to its roots and its awareness of its personal past: "In my beginning is my end." The Dry Salvages with its note to "a small group of rocks, with a beacon, off the N. E. coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts," returns us to the poet's early memories and his feeling



for the sea. Little Gidding leads us to a rebuilt chapel, previously destroyed by the Puritans. It was the home of Nicholas Farrar who, in 1625, established a religious community there. It represents a symbol "perfected in death," a hope that salvation can be reached through the purgation of the world of desire. There is a movement inherent in the ordering of the titles, a movement through time. Like Phlebas in The Waste Land:

As he rose and fell  
He passed the stages of his age and youth  
Entering the whirlpool. (316-318)

Each title represents a moment, an intersection of time past and time future. The Voice moves from the realization of awakening memory, to its return to its ancestral home and to an awareness of its debt and roots in the past, to its memories of early youth in another land, to its return to its spiritual home and to its search for release, signified as "A condition of complete simplicity." The pattern is that of a pilgrimage, an odyssey.

The first movement of Burnt Norton places the reader immediately in the convolutions of a metaphysical discourse. The voices of Francis Herbert Bradley and Buddha intermingle:

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.

But we are not asked to "keep our metaphysics warm"; rather, the bird calls us into "our first world." Whether this is the world of our childhood or that of our first parents we are not told. It may be only this ruined formal garden or the memory of it. The rose garden is a world where the music is "unheard" and the eyebeam is "unseen." The empty pool, framed by dry concrete, fills, and the lotos, with its echoes of Tennyson, the



Buddha and the possibility of awakening inspiration, rises. "Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty": "Oed' und leer das Meer." The garden of "our first world," like the "hyacinth garden," is a scene of initiation of which we can only catch a glimpse. The bird speaks suddenly: "human kind cannot bear very much reality." The last lines echo Bradley:

Time past and time future  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.

Our perception of time is the perception of moments, Bradley's "finite centres" (immediate experience). Moments occur in the intersection of "What might have been and what has been."

The epigraph to Burnt Norton is two fragments taken from the writings of Heraclitus: "Though the law of things is universal in scope, most men act as though they had insight of their own," and "The way up and the way down are one and the same."

With awakening memory, the Voice returns to its roots, where:

Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,  
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place.

The beginning of East Coker, with its inversion of Mary Stuart's motto, "In my end is my beginning," brings the Voice to its perception of the cyclical pattern of nature of which it is a part. The cycles of civilization, of buildings, the monuments that man has erected to himself, shifts to a description of the landscape where "The dahlias sleep in the empty silence." Then the Voice moves us secretively into the past, to a vision:

The association of man and woman  
In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie--  
A dignified and commodious sacrament.  
Two and two, necessarye coniunction,  
Holding ech other by the hand or the arm  
Whiche betokeneth concorde.



There is the conscious mixing of the lines taken from Sir Thomas Elyot's Boke named the Gouvernour (1531), with Eliot's lines. Elyot's words are meant to be recognized for his dancers are in harmony with nature:

Keeping the rhythm in their dancing  
As in their living in the living seasons.

East Coker follows the gaze of the poet among his ancestors, but when he speaks, the "I" attracts no attention to itself:

I am here  
Or there, or elsewhere.

It does not matter for the end is the same for all: "Dung and death."

The "I" of The Dry Salvages is similarly impersonal; it is the expression of the Voice and not of Eliot:

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river  
Is a strong brown god--sullen, untamed and intractable.

The river has been forgotten by "the dwellers in cities," the citizens of the Waste Land. But the river can wait, and there are those who have not forgotten:

His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,  
In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,  
In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,  
And the evening circle in the winter gaslight.

"His rhythm" is present in possible echoes from The Waste Land in the "rank ailanthus" and the "April dooryard"; Sweeney Among the Nightingales in the "smell of grapes," and Rhapsody on a Windy Night in the "winter gaslight." Perhaps the significance of the river is "The voice of the falling water, like the voices of the sea and the wind, was as an outer memory to a contemplative listener."<sup>10</sup>

"The sea has many voices,/Many gods and many voices," and Prufrock has heard the "mermaids singing each to each":

The sea howl  
And the sea yelp, are different voices



Often together heard: the whine in the rigging,  
 The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,  
 The distant rote in the granite teeth,  
 And the wailing warning from the approaching headland.  
 Are all sea voices.

The voices continue until the bell "Clangs" calling us to prayer, a prayer to all gods, not only the gods of the sea.

The poet returns to Little Gidding in "Midwinter spring" to renew a spiritual bond, to search for spiritual answers, to be cleansed in the "pentecostal fire." And his expression of feeling for the mystery of this place is the Voice reaching into the past to places where spirituality had been forgotten:

There are other places  
 Which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws,  
 Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city--  
 But this is the nearest, in place and time,  
 Now and in England.

The "Unreal City" of the Waste Land once more appears, but here, "If you came this way," there is the realization that

...prayer is more  
 Than an order of words, the conscious occupation  
 Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.

And then the echo from the Inferno which could be the remembrance of Guido da Montefeltro speaking from within his prison of fire, or perhaps Ulysses, who is seen walking through the flames by Dante and Virgil:

And what the dead had no speech for, when living,  
 They can tell you, being dead: the communication  
 Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.

There is also, in these same lines, the impending descent of the pentecostal fire, the voice of the Holy Ghost.

The first section of each poem not only serves as an introduction to that particular poem, but when viewed horizontally rather than vertically, the sections show a particular movement. The Voice is leading



us somewhere: from "our first world" to a place where prayer is "valid." The Voice calls on other voices to aid us in our travels. The other voices in the poems call out to us or are overheard. The rose of Burnt Norton is brought to the fire of Little Gidding for they are the central images of the pilgrimage that the Four Quartets presents. The Voice narrates the journey, a journey which is sometimes presented in the simplest allegory. The parallel lines of development in each section uncover the basic simplicity of the movements. In each one, the underlying thought is more clear, more simply expressed. Each successive thought is in a state of movement towards purity of expression. From the convoluted metaphysical debate of Burnt Norton, we are led to Little Gidding where the vision of Farrar's religious community is an allegory for the purity desired by the soul. It is a movement from "our first world" to the intersection of the timeless moment. In the remaining sections the movement is the same, from what appears to be complexity, both verbal and spiritual, to a condition where opposites can be resolved.

### III

The second sections of the poems concern the operation of memory and the difficulties of age. The passages in each poem differ in intensity. The pattern is built up and sustained in the first two, and it appears to rest in The Dry Salvages for the breakthrough in Little Gidding.

The ceaseless agitation of Heraclitus' elements takes place at the "still Point," but in Burnt Norton there are more important considerations than the external world. Although the elements are in the same state of flux in man, the Voice, like that of the Buddha and all ascetics,



directs us to askesis:

The inner freedom from the practical desire,  
The release from action and suffering, release from the inner  
And the outer compulsion.

This is to be the goal, the end of the pilgrimage. This would necessitate the removal of man from time, but the "enchainment of past and future" is a part of our being. The only possible escape in time is through memory. The corpse buried by Stetson must be raised, for only memory allows:

Erehebung without emotion, concentration  
Without elimination, both a new world  
And the old made explicit.

There is little awareness of a voice speaking. The lines are so transparent, so explicitly truthful in their expression of the operation of memory that the Voice, without place in time and without gender, is hushed.

"With the disturbance of the spring," East Coker echoes the cruelty of the first lines of The Waste Land. But the Voice does not leave us in a description of the landscape; rather, we enter the realm of "constellation wars." A place where, before this time:

De Bailhache, Fresca, Mrs. Cammel whirled  
Beyond the circuit of the shuddering Bear.

The poet's own judgement of his lines is likewise "not very satisfactory" for he expresses a further disappointment, a far more meaningful one:

What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,  
Long hoped for calm, the autumnal serenity  
And the wisdom of age?

All that age could provide previously was "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season." Like many of the passages, this episode of transparent biography serves as a stepping stone to a further consideration. In this case, the deeper meaning of wisdom. The disciple of F. H. Bradley notes that there is,



At best, only a limited value  
In the knowledge derived from experience.

Dante, lost "in a dark wood," greets us with Dr. Watson "On the edge of a grimpen." But they are simply men who are lost at this time, their voices do not carry us forward. The Voice tells us:

The only wisdom we can hope to acquire  
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.

It is perhaps for this reason, or with this realization, that the Fisher King continues to fish at the end of The Waste Land. The section ends with a parody of Stevenson's Requiem:

The houses are all gone under the sea.

The dancers are all gone under the hill.

The heavily end-stopped lines with their intentional spacing impart a tone of finality.

The clang of the bell which ends the first part of The Dry Salvages calls the Voice to prayer. The prayers that it recites are all expressed in terms of opposites: "While emotion takes to itself the emotionless." Each stanza has a formal structure in which the first and last lines rhyme with every other first and last line. The imagery is that of the sea, often a sea of waste, sometimes that of the fishermen. "There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing," and the play of rhyme on the word "annunciation" ends:

The bone's prayer to Death its God. Only the hardly, barely  
prayable  
Prayer of the one Annunciation.

The Voice ceases from prayer and once again returns to the problem of age. The transparency of the biography cannot be described in terms of degrees for the process is that of simple recollection, and its simplicity eliminates the need to identify the voice:



I have said before  
 That the past experience revived in the meaning  
 Is not the experience of one life only  
 But of many generations.

The voice, now familiar, continues to forbid identification yet places its childhood where there flows a "river with its cargo of dead negroes, cows and chicken coops." It is the Voice's trick to lead us to the point of identification and then tell us with a benevolent smile that we need not bother to name it.

The second part of Little Gidding begins with the destruction of the elements of the flux: they no longer undergo their constant transformation. They die in the realizations presented from the preceding Quartets: "Ash on an old man's sleeve/Is all the ash the burnt roses leave," from Burnt Norton; "Dust inbreathed was a house--/The wall, the wainscot, and the mouse," from East Coker; "Dead water and dead sand/Contending for the upper hand," from The Dry Salvages. Little Gidding is also included in the echoes:

Water and fire shall rot  
 The marred foundations we forgot,  
 Of sanctuary and choir.

And then "In the uncertain hour before the morning," the poet meets "some dead master," and one of Eliot's most powerful poetic passages unfolds.

There has been much discussion concerning the identity of this "familiar compound ghost." The passage may have been inspired by the meeting of Dante with his old master, Bruneto Latini, in Canto XV of the Inferno. Even if this was the case, the ghost is not Dante. What of Eliot's master? The presence of Pound cannot be substantiated by reference to any of the lines; however, Eliot's debt to Pound is sufficient enough to allow that conjecture which would place Pound somewhere in the background. There are also claims concerning Yeats, Milton and Swift.



We are told, however, that the ghost is compound:

I had caught the look of some dead master  
Whom I had known, forgotten, half recalled.  
Both one and many.

The poet and the ghost walk the streets together discussing as between master and pupil, their debts to each other and the ways in which each has changed. There is no element of subordination: they speak as equals. The voices of the poets of their tradition sound throughout the passage. "Last season's fruit is eaten" may be a reference to the voice of Odarsi in the Purgatorio:

O empty glory of Man's frail ambition,  
How soon its topmost boughs their green must yield;  
If no Dark Age succeed, what short fruition! (xi, 91-93)

There is a multiplicity of reference in the line, "When I left my body on a distant shore." Its most obvious reference may be to Eliot's use of the Lazarus story, that Lazarus has once more returned from the dead with tales of the "distant shore." Kenner suggests that it may refer to Dante who, by tradition, supposedly visited Oxford about 1308.<sup>11</sup>

The "distant shore" may also be the "ulterior ripa" of Virgil.<sup>12</sup> The poet quotes Stephane Mallarmé in the line, "To purify the dialect of the tribe."<sup>13</sup>

The passage beginning "Let me disclose the gifts reserved for age," with its indignant phrases, may echo Swift and Yeats. In a letter to Maurice Johnson (June 27, 1947), Eliot acknowledges the use of Swift in this section and adds that it associated Swift with W.B. Yeats.<sup>14</sup>

Helen Gardner feels that the lines echo Milton's "melancholy picture of old age."<sup>15</sup> Hugh Kenner notes that Horace Gregory said Eliot identified the ghost partly with Yeats, and emphasized that it was also partly himself.<sup>16</sup> In his essay on Yeats (1940), Eliot distinguishes Yeats as



a poet who can handle the feeling of age with incredible power. He says: "For the young can see him as a poet who in his work remained in the best sense always young, who even in one sense became young as he aged. But the old, unless they are stirred to something of the honesty with oneself expressed in the poetry, will be shocked by such a revelation of what man really is and remains."<sup>17</sup> The "gifts reserved for age" are enumerated:

First, the cold friction of expiring sense...

Second. the conscious impotence of rage...

And last, the rending pain of re-enactment.

Kenner claims the last lines echo Yeats' Purgatory, a play which "gives a masterly exposition of the emotions of an old man."<sup>18</sup> The discourse ends on the note that restoration comes only from the "refining fire," another of the allusions to Dante. "In the disfigured street," the meeting between the poet and the ghost ends:

He left me, with a kind of valediction,  
And faded on the blowing of the horn.

The last line, with its reference to the ghost of Hamlet's father, also echoes the "Co co rico co co rico" which drives all ghosts indoors in The Waste Land.

The scene is considered by many, W.H.Auden for instance, to be the best imitation of Dante in English. Eliot has progressed as an artist. Although he still uses Dante's lines and makes allusions to his work in his own verse, he now has the ability to write Dante's line. The task, however, was not easy. Writing in "What Dante Means to Me" (1950), he says:

Twenty years after writing The Waste Land, I wrote, in Little Gidding, a passage which is intended to be the nearest equivalent to a canto of the Inferno or the Purgatorio, in style as well as content, that I could achieve. The intention, of course, was the same as with my allusions to



Dante in The Waste Land: to present to the mind of the reader a parallel, by means of contrast, between the Inferno and the Purgatorio, which Dante visited and a hallucinated scene after an air raid. But the method is different: here I was debarred from quoting or adapting at length--I borrowed and adapted freely only a few phrases--because I was imitating. My first problem was to find an approximation to the terza rima without rhyming....I therefore adopted, for my purpose, a simple alternation of unrhymed masculine and feminine termination, as the nearest way of giving the light effect of the rhyme in Italian.<sup>19</sup>

The passage began with "the dark dove with a flickering tongue," an Inferno image of the returning bomber, and ended with an admonition to restore ourselves in the "refining fire." The passage does not play at verbal approximations of meaning. It works by simple statement and is held together by the strength of the image of the "compound ghost." Again, the voices are assumed in the recollection of the Voice which operates, in this case, by transparent declamation. In this sense, this passage in Little Gidding is more selfless than the similar parts of the preceding Quartets. True, there is the same awareness of what the poet has done and what he feels, but the emphasis is not as heavy as in the preceding sections. The emphasis is now on the direction of the movement and the considerations of the self are subordinated to this, even to the point of askesis.

#### IV

In the third movement of Burnt Norton the poet descends into the Underground: "Here is a place of disaffection," where both light and dark are insufficient. There is "Neither plenitude nor vacancy," and the faces of the passengers are framed in the squares of light cut by the train windows. All things are caught up and whirled in the vortex. The circle presented by,

Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,  
Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate,



is smaller than, but similar to, the circle of "Jerusalem Athens Alexandria/Vienna London." The stops along the line are meaningless moments in time. In a flash of Dantesque imagery we are told to "Descend lower," where by askesis we may undergo:

Dessication of the world of sense,  
Evacuation of the world of fancy,  
Inoperancy of the world of spirit.

By these, we may obtain release "while the world moves/In appetancy, on its metalled ways." Lest we think that these directives, with their predominantly ascetic tone, are too straight forward, Kenner explains the irony of the passage:

In this Underground scene, curiously enough, the instructed reader may catch a glimpse of the author, sauntering through the crowd as Alfred Hitchcock does in each of his films. For its locale, Eliot noted, sharing a private joke with his brother in Massachusetts, is specifically the Gloucester Road Station, near the poet's South Kensington headquarters, the point of intersection of the Circle Line with the Picadilly tube to Russell Square. Whoever would take the endless circle and entrain for the offices of Faber & Faber must "descend lower," and by the spiral stairs if he chooses to walk. "This is the one way, and the other is the same"; the other, adjacent to the stairs, is a lift, which he negotiates "not in movement, but in abstention from movement."<sup>20</sup>

As with many of Eliot's tricks of meaning, the fact that the two views are contrapuntal operates to the detriment of neither.

The first line of the third part of East Coker begins with the cry of the blind Samson in combination with the first line of Henry Vaughan's They Are All Gone into the World of Light. But the Voice tells us, through the images of the darkened theatre, the train stopped between stations, and the etherized patient, to wait, for "the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting." As with Milton, "They also serve who only stand and wait." Once again we hear:

The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy  
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony  
Of death and birth.



The transparently biographical Voice intercedes once more to pass judgement on itself, but this time it does not linger.

The lines following it are structured on the "dialectical method of arriving at truth by successive negations of the false."<sup>21</sup> The lines are almost a literal rendering of the maxims which appear at the front of The Ascent of Mount Carmel by Saint John of The Cross.<sup>22</sup> It may be only within the mystics power to realize the meaning of the lines:

And what you do not know is the only thing you know  
 And what you own is what you do not own  
 And where you are is where you are not.

The logic is missing but the meaning of the lines does not exist in the realm of the purely rational. An explanation of their meaning would be a restatement, for in each of the lines true reconciliation occurs. The epigraph to Sweeney Agonistes from Saint John of The Cross perhaps provides some clarification: "Hence the soul cannot be possessed of the divine union, until it has divested itself of the love of created beings." The approach to the meaning of the different sections of the Quartets is often through the voices that speak there.

Krishna tells Arjuna in The Bhagavad-Gita:

This is the mark of the man  
 Whose renunciation is abiding:  
 He hates not, nor desires,  
 For surmounting all dualities, how easily  
 He wins release from bondage.<sup>23</sup>

Our desire for release must be passionless. We must live the moment, the intersection of past and future, for it is only in this moment that we have existence:

You can receive this: "on whatever sphere of being  
 The mind of man may be intent  
 At the time of death"--that is the one action  
 (And the time of death is every moment)  
 Which shall fructify in the lives of others:  
 And do not think of the fruit of action.



With these words to guide us, the Voice admonishes us to "Fare forward," to continue our pilgrimage, for "the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back." The third section of The Dry Salvages ends on this note of hope.

The third movement of Little Gidding, like the same movement in the other poems, is concerned with memory. The poet has come to this chapel for a reason, and his reason becomes more and more apparent:

This is the use of memory  
For liberation--not less of love but expanding  
Of love beyond desire.

The poet then quotes the words of Dame Julian, a medieval English mystic:

Sin is Behovely, but  
All shall be well, and  
All manner of thing shall be well.<sup>24</sup>

It was later in Dame Julian's career that she was given the meanings of her revelations, and the answer to them was Love. The theme of love is taken up later in the lyric fourth section of the poem. The Voice returns to memories "Of three men, and more, on the scaffold," an obvious allusion to Charles, Laud and Stafford, and to "one who died blind and quiet," a reference to Milton or possibly James Joyce. These men, like Farrar, leave us "A symbol perfected in death." The Voice in this section moves with easy grace from complexity to simplicity. The parallel sections in the other Quartets lack the grace of Little Gidding. The movement of the pilgrimage is also from complexity to simplicity; it is the search for the true way, through Buddha, Krishna and mysticism, but only at Little Gidding is there the possibility of an answer.

V

The movement upwards, in the simplicity of expression, is best



seen in the lyric fourth movements of the Quartets. In Burnt Norton the Voice will not speak with any certainty. The eye perceives the flashes of light similar to those in the Underground, but there are no frames of black to surround them:

After the kingfisher's wing  
Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still  
At the still point of the turning world.

At this "still point" all light inheres. Fragmentary flashes of light take their meaning from the greatest source of light. Aristotle saw the "still point" as the point from which all energy flowed.<sup>25</sup> In Christian terms the allusion applies plainly to God, but its direct reference is more to any "first mover." The "fingers of yew" also occur in Ash-Wednesday in which they frame "The silent sister veiled in white and blue," the liturgical colours of the Virgin Mary.

Most commentators consider the lyric section of East Coker to be one of the weakest passages in the Quartets. The only interpretation of the section which appears viable is that of simple allegory. It would appear more than useless to look for references further than the obvious for the "wounded surgeon" or the "dying nurse" or the "ruined millionaire." The last line of the lyric expresses the almost child-like difficulty of coming to terms with religious belief, "we call this Friday good." There is a similar hint of incredulity in the reference to the Eucharist, but the freshness of the imagery fits with the Eucharist's liturgical implications.<sup>26</sup> Within this pattern, simple allegory succeeds.

The lyric of The Dry Salvages is in the form of a prayer, spoken by the Voice in the name of the people of the sea:

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,  
Pray for all those who are in ships, those  
Whose business has to do with ships, and  
Those concerned with every lawful traffic  
And those who conduct them.



The emphasis in this section is on the content rather than the form of prayer. As Helen Gardner points out, there is a unity between the idea and the symbol in the prayer to Mary: "She is rightly prayed to in a poem of the sea, because she is 'Stella Maris' to whom the fishermen and their wives pray. She appears also at the poem's lyrical climax as the hand-maid of the Lord, who made the great response to the message of the angel, and as the Mother of Christ, whose birth gives meaning to time. She is also prayed to as Mater Dolorosa, for this is a poem of sorrows...."<sup>27</sup>

In Little Gidding the lyric movement stuns with its simplicity; again, there is no need to place the Voice in time. Instead of "the dark dove with the flickering tongue," a fusing of "the departing bomber with the Pentecostal visitant,"<sup>28</sup> we see:

The dove descending breaks the air  
With flame of incandescent terror.

It is the celebration of Pentecost, and the dove descends with startling urgency. We are to be redeemed from the fire of desire by the fire of Love. We cannot cleanse ourselves: we can only be cleansed by Love. At this point the poem moves to a clearly Christian context, for faith has now become a requirement for redemption.<sup>29</sup>

## VI

The narrative on the difficulty of using words presents a shrewd insight into the way in which poetry achieves its end. That the words lose their meaning with time is necessary, for the only meaning they have is in immediate time. What transcends their temporality is the pattern into which they are formed:

Only by the form, the pattern,  
Can words or music reach  
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still  
Moves perpetually in its stillness.



This is the true world of art. The world of great art in which a great poet can exhaust the possibilities of his language. If the language is a great language, like Dante's Italian or Virgil's Latin, so much the better.

The Voice continues, not only expressing the difficulties of writing poetry, of which Eliot was acutely aware, but also passing judgement on the entire narrative which has preceded this reflection:

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still.

The Voice has tried to tell us of things for which there are no descriptions: to tell us of feelings which no one except the experiencing individual can feel; to tell us that we are "Caught in the form of limitation/Between un-being and being." Immediately, we are whisked back to "our first world" by the laughter of the children in the garden. The Voice, at this time, can only move by approximation for it is trying to speak of universals in a language with temporal limits.

Karl Shapiro said that "The motivating force in Eliot's work is the search for the mystical centre of experience. This search in his case has been fruitless and increasingly frustrating. Eliot's entire career is a history of his failure to penetrate the mystical consciousness."<sup>30</sup> Eliot was not a mystic and knew the limitations which that entailed in attempting to understand the mystical consciousness. He knew quite well that he could not penetrate it; however, he does not ignore the mystic's intuition. In the last movements of Burnt Norton he refers to the figure of the ten stairs which has its source in the mystical writings of Saint John of The Cross. The movement up and



down the stairs was an attempt to reach the perfection of love, union with the Almighty. Eliot had used him previously in The Hollow Men in the figure of "death's dream kingdom." In both cases, and in others in which Saint John or Dame Julian are used, Eliot refers to their work by quotation or, as in this passage, he uses the pattern, "The detail of the pattern is movement,/As in the figure of the ten stairs." It is another case in which Eliot is not as ambitious as some would seem to believe. He lets the words speak for themselves.

The consideration of some aspect of language is common to the fifth movements of the Quartets and in East Coker we overhear the poet:

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years--  
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres--  
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt  
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure.

What is there to sustain "a raid on the inarticulate"? The answer echoes forth in the word "tradition." Tradition presents a viable way of keeping things alive, "the fight to recover what has been lost/And found and lost again and again." The poet, in his sense of his age, can apprehend the pattern:

Not the intense moment  
Isolated, with no before and after,  
But a lifetime burning in every moment  
And not the lifetime of one man only  
But of old stones that cannot be deciphered.

The stones are the markers of echoes known and unknown: Mallarmé, Yeats, Joyce, Pound, Milton, Saint John, Dante--others too numerous to count or mention, and those who remained private to the poet; those who gave and were thanked, but were not mentioned. These are perhaps the echoes that leave no mark on their stones. "Old men ought to be explorers": Andrew Eliot: T. S. Eliot.



The Dry Salvages turns from language to communication; particularly, communication with the spirits. The visage of Madame Sosostris with her "wicked pack of cards" peers forth "To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams." There are many ways of trying to reach immortality:

Men's curiosity searches past and future  
And clings to that dimension.

Caught in these two dimensions of time, man is a captive of temporal methods of release and cannot move beyond his own temporality:

But to apprehend  
The point of intersection with the timeless  
With time, is an occupation for the saint.

The Voice tells us that we only receive hints; we see the manifestations of the intersection in flashes of light, perhaps from the kingfisher's wing. All we can have are the "hints and guesses" allowed our nature.

Hope:

Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.  
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.

The answer is the Word made flesh, "the impossible union," difficult for all men to realize, incomprehensibly absurd for others.<sup>31</sup> With Incarnation, the "hint half guessed," the preparation is complete for the last movement of Little Gidding.

Here, in the reflection on language, there are echoes from the Quartets which have come before: references to the beginning and the end which echo through East Coker; "The complete consort dancing together," from the same poem; "An easy commerce of old and new" reflecting an outlook on tradition expressed throughout the Quartets. There are many other examples. Lines such as the following capture many references in a few words:



And any action  
 Is a step to the block, to fire, down the sea's throat  
 Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.

For it is only in the dying that we come to life; we are born with the dead, "See, they return, and bring us with them." Here, now, before and forever:

The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew tree  
 Are of equal duration.

The stanza ends with a move to the central image of the poem, the chapel at Little Gidding.

The passage which follows presents a series of flashes which lead to the final realization. The connection between the two passages is made by the line, "With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling," from The Cloud of Unknowing, a fourteenth century mystical work. The line is crucial because it places the emphasis on Love, notably the love of God and the love that God has for us.

In the last stanza of Little Gidding Eliot begins with the now familiar circle pattern:

And the end of all our exploring  
 Will be to arrive where we started  
 And know the place for the first time.

This last line may be an echo from a poem Ithaca by the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy:

Then pray that the road is long.  
 That the summer mornings are many  
 that you will enter ports seen for the first time.<sup>32</sup>

There is, according to George Seferis, a similarity of sensibility between Cavafy and Eliot, "a blending, an indissoluble mixture of feeling, learning and thinking."<sup>33</sup> They had a similar interest in language and tradition, and Eliot published Ithaca in The Criterion II and some of



Cavafy's other work in volume VIII.<sup>34</sup> The importance of Cavafy for Eliot would be difficult to estimate: he appears a remembered voice. His voice represents the Alexandrian Greek tradition, but what is most important is the idea that he expresses of life as an odyssey. Georges Poulet says of Eliot's three lines: "The sacrifice that we make of our passions, our joys, our own person, in order to accept, first, the order of the past, next the duties imposed by the future, and finally the total submission to the central authority of The Being; 'still point of the turning world,' that point which we left to undertake our peripheral and dolorous Odyssey in duration,"<sup>35</sup> will end in the realization that we have come full circle. From Burnt Norton to Little Gidding, with the image of the rose, we will now "know the place for the first time." The end of any odyssey or quest, and even now in Little Gidding there are echoes of the original quest of The Waste Land, is the spiritual realization in the chapel at Little Gidding that "the fire and the rose are one." The Christian life, Eliot's quest for meaning from Prufrock through Buddha, is reflected here if only in the imaginary waters whose "surface glittered out of the heart of light."

## VII

The Voice, in the last movement of Little Gidding, is completely unobtrusive. The words stand by themselves in the purity of their expression, and if we hear the Voice at all we are not conscious of it. It has become a part of the pattern of release and in the resolution of opposites it disappears. But what role has it played in the Quartets? Unlike The Waste Land, there is no centre to which the Voice is attached, no Tiresias. The Voice is free to roam, to speak loudly and clearly



or merely to be overheard. Even in its transparently biographical aspects, there is no need to designate the Voice as that of Eliot. The Voice is all the voices in the poem. As narrator of the pilgrimage, the Voice is a part of all we meet along the way. It is a container for echoes. It is in the echo pattern of the Quartets that the Voice has its meaning: it is both "one and many." The echoes forecast other echoes in the poem; they are also reflexive, flashing echoes back and forth in the plenum. In Burnt Norton we are told "Other echoes/Inhabit the garden." We are not told to listen but to find them, and we find them everywhere. "Love is itself unmoving" from Burnt Norton echoes in "Love is most nearly itself/When here and now cease to matter" in East Coker. Both are present in "a lifetime's death in love" in The Dry Salvages, and all are realized in "With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling" in Little Gidding. Similarly, there are echoes from the garden of "our first world" in all the Quartets.

The echo structure of the Quartets has a viable explanation in the musical analysis of the "Quartet" structure. But the pattern of the poems has also a structure much like a molecule. Each echo is linked to another by some immediate similarity or reference, by common ancestry and so on. At any point of similarity a connection can be made. What occurs in the resulting linkage is that the lines of connection ultimately cross. At these points of intersection new echoes arise, or are connected, and in turn they establish communication with their referents. This matrix of echoes will occur whether the poems are examined singly or as a whole, tracing, in a linear pattern, their lines of development. Perhaps the closest one could come to the number of possible echoes would be to superimpose the vertical and horizontal matrices.



## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The children in the garden are still present at the end of Little Gidding, an echo in the poet's memory. As he reflects in the last stanza:

The voice of the hidden waterfall  
And the children in the apple-tree  
Not known, because not looked for  
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness  
Between two waves of the sea.

The voice is only "half-heard" because now, at this time and in this garden, the self has ceased to exist. Only through the awareness of self can selflessness occur. With that self-knowledge, the self loses all importance and can attain "A condition of complete simplicity." One might ask at this time if the religious theme of Little Gidding exceeds the poetic realm in its personal intensity. The most immediate reaction to the poem is that it is a diary of the soul, and in a way it is, but keeping in mind Eliot's reaction to Matthew Arnold's idea that poetry would become a substitute for religion, the importance of Little Gidding, in fact Four Quartets, is that they describe, or try to describe with limited tools, what the religious experience is like; Four Quartets leads the reader to a perception of what Incarnation meant to a particular man, it is not a generalized experience or a substitute for anything.

In the Purgatorio Virgil can only lead Dante to the upper steps of the stair into Paradise, he himself cannot enter. This is also the relation between Eliot and his reader: Eliot can describe what Incarnation means to him, and if we understand his pattern in Four Quartets, it is possible to gain some insight into Eliot's perception of the meaning of the "impossible union." The poetry, however, can only describe what the



experience means to Eliot and, in some ways, how it feels to realize that "the fire and the rose are one"; the poetry is not a substitute for the experience nor was it ever meant to be.

An intrinsic part of the pattern which Eliot explicates in all of his poetry, not only in Four Quartets, is the voice. The poet is, in the final analysis, a voice. Just as other poets were voices to Eliot, Eliot is a voice to us. His advantage as a poet is that he can engage these other voices in his poetry. In his use of Dante and Virgil, who are not a part of our experience in time, he can move beyond time into the timeless. It is through poetry that he can move beyond poetry. The voice then, as personal as each voice is in its echoes and as personal as our own voices are to us, allows Eliot to move beyond voice to a point where the voice speaks silently. It is in this realm of silence, where the individual voice is neither perceived nor identified, that Incarnation has its meaning.

The voices in Eliot's poetry are formed into a pattern and achieve their "stillness" in their particular pattern in each poem. The voices are "one and many." Eliot's voice is the most elusive of all, it speaks most personally to us in Little Gidding while still refusing outright identification. His voice, however, is a part of the pattern of his poetry as are the voices or echoes of the other poets of his tradition. Eliot's voice is not a compound of other voices; his poetry, however, is built around the compound of unity and disparity created by his own voice and the voices of other poets. The voices, in the end, speak for themselves. The reader must listen for the half-remembered voices of memory and search out the echoes in the garden. If we listen carefully and search with purpose, we can hear or overhear or listen to "The yellow



fog that rubs its back on window panes," and "the mermaids singing, each to each." We can hear the voice of the street lamp "sputter" and "mutter" and direct our attention. Gerontion tells us, "I have lost my sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch," and the Sibyl tells us she wants to die. The voices of religion, revealed and concealed, echo from the Waste Land. But in The Waste Land the voices do not require mouths, the "Unreal City" speaks to us throughout the poem in its images of sterility. The "inviolable voice" can never be quieted, and hair, under the manipulation of the brush, "Glowed into words, then would be savagely still." We await the knock on the door and the voice of the key in the lock, never quite sure of freedom or imprisonment. Throughout all of this waiting, the Thames daughters mourn their loss while Buddha and Saint Augustine exhort us to travel through the flames; however, the voices lose themselves in the "Murmur of maternal lamentation." We cannot be sure that the dawn brought to us by the crowing cock will be any different from other mornings, that the vigil in the Chapel Perilous will provide us with anything more than we already have for it is only at "nightfall" that we will realize the implications of the Buddha's directives.

The search is for "other echoes," and, in the poet's search for meaning in his language, "Words, after speech, reach into the silence." The voices cry, shriek, scream, howl and yelp but "The sea howl/And the sea yelp are different voices." The voices that call us to prayer are different from the voices of Elyot's men and women dancing around the bonfire. The music "Of the weak pipe and the little drum," is different from the "music heard so deeply/That it is not heard at all." The whine in the rigging is as much a voice as the voices of temptation in the desert or the "loud lament of the disconsolate chimera." The voices guide us, lead



us, berate us for our slowness; they have their own vitality, their own meaning. They find words we "never thought to speak," and in doing so they perceive the "easy commerce of the old and new." The voices of the past and the future have their meaning in the immediate intersection which creates the immediate present.

The Voice tells us in Little Gidding that "Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,/Every poem an epitaph."



## NOTES

### CHAPTER I:

<sup>1</sup>Leavis, The Common Pursuit, 285.

<sup>2</sup>Eliot, "Imperfect Critics," The Sacred Wood, 37-38.

<sup>3</sup>Eliot, "A Commentary," 668.

<sup>4</sup>Eliot. "To Criticize The Critic," To Criticize The Critic, 16.

<sup>5</sup>Eliot, "Philip Massinger," Selected Essays, 206.

<sup>6</sup>Time I, (3 March 1923), 13.

<sup>7</sup>Amy Lowell: quoted by Brown, "Mr. Eliot and Some Enemies," 81.

<sup>8</sup>Craig, "The Defeatism of The Waste Land," 241.

<sup>9</sup>Wilson, "The Poetry of Drouth," 615.

<sup>10</sup>Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, 290-291.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 293.

<sup>12</sup>Brooks, "The Waste Land: Critique of the Myth," 157.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 171-172.

<sup>14</sup>Winters, In Defense of Reason, 500.

<sup>15</sup>Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance, 54.

<sup>16</sup>Aiken, "An Anatomy of Melancholy," 202.

<sup>17</sup>Guardian, (13 October 1923), from: Cox, T. S. Eliot: The Waste Land, 30.

<sup>18</sup>TLS, (20 September 1923), 616.

### CHAPTER II:

<sup>1</sup>Eliot, "Tradition and The Individual Talent," Selected Essays, 22.

<sup>2</sup>Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance, 41ff. The basis of Shapiro's objection is that Eliot only exists on paper, and that the relationship between his poetry and his criticism is not logical for that reason.



<sup>3</sup> Eliot, After Strange Gods, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Eliot, "To Criticize The Critic," 14.

<sup>5</sup> Eliot, "Matthew Arnold," The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism, 118-119.

<sup>6</sup> Eliot, "Milton I," On Poetry and Poets, 157.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Essays, 288.

<sup>11</sup> Eliot, "Tradition and The Individual Talent," 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>13</sup> Eliot, "The Three Voices of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets, 96. cf. "Charles Whibley" (1931). Eliot says: "...there are only four ways of thinking: to talk to others, or to one another, or to talk to oneself, or to talk to God." Selected Essays, 501.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 110-111.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>16</sup> Eliot, "The Music of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>19</sup> Eliot, "Dante," Selected Essays, 238.

<sup>20</sup> Eliot, Notes Towards The Definition of Culture, 57.

<sup>21</sup> Eliot, "The Social Function of Poetry," On Poetry and Poets, 12.

<sup>22</sup> Eliot, "What is a Classic," On Poetry and Poets, 66-67.

<sup>23</sup> Eliot, "Milton II," On Poetry and Poets, 170.

<sup>24</sup> Pound, ABC of Reading, 33. Pound says: "The man of understanding can no more sit quiet and resigned while his country lets its literature decay, and lets good writing meet with contempt, than a good doctor could sit quiet and contented while some ignorant child was infecting itself with tuberculosis under the impression that it was merely eating jam tarts."

<sup>25</sup> Eliot, "Johnson as Critic and Poet," On Poetry and Poets, 222.



<sup>26</sup> Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," 289.

<sup>27</sup> Eliot, "The Social Function of Poetry," 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> Eliot, Notes Towards The Definition of Culture, 114.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>30</sup> Eliot, "Wordsworth and Coleridge," The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism, 85.

<sup>31</sup> Eliot, "Matthew Arnold," 109.

<sup>32</sup> Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," 288.

<sup>33</sup> Eliot, "Tradition and The Individual Talent," 20.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>35</sup> Pound, Letters, 40. The letter is dated September 30, 1914.

<sup>36</sup> Eliot, "Ezra Pound: His Metric and His Poetry," To Criticize The Critic, 166-167.

<sup>37</sup> Eliot, "Matthew Arnold," 118.

<sup>38</sup> Eliot, "Rudyard Kipling," On Poetry and Poets, 293.

<sup>39</sup> Eliot, "Reflections on Vers Libre," To Criticize The Critic, 188.

<sup>40</sup> Eliot, "Rudyard Kipling," 274.

<sup>41</sup> Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," 287.

<sup>42</sup> Eliot, "Lancelot Andrewes," For Lancelot Andrewes, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>45</sup> Eliot, "Dante," 268-269.

<sup>46</sup> Eliot, "Thomas Middleton," Selected Essays, 162.

<sup>47</sup> Eliot, "Conclusion," The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism, 152.

<sup>48</sup> Eliot, "Ezra Pound: His Metric and His Poetry," 175.

<sup>49</sup> Hulme, "Contempt for Language," 491.

<sup>50</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 146.



CHAPTER III:

<sup>1</sup>Wright, The Poet in The Poem, 65.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>3</sup>Eliot, Notes on the Waste Land, Collected Poems 1909-1962, 82.

<sup>4</sup>Wright, The Poet in The Poem, 66.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.,

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>9</sup>Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot, 2.

<sup>10</sup>Unger, Moments and Patterns, 157.

<sup>11</sup>Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot, 1-35.

<sup>12</sup>Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 199.

<sup>13</sup>Pound, Translations. 23.

<sup>14</sup>Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot, 89.

<sup>15</sup>Kenner, "Blood for the Ghosts," 331.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 340.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 337.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. The example is quoted by Kenner from an article by Pound in the New Age from one of the "Limbs of Osiris" series.

<sup>20</sup>Freedman, "Jazz Rhythms and T. S. Eliot," 419 and 435.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 423.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 419.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 427.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 429.



<sup>26</sup> cf. Shakespeare, Sonnet XXIX, "Desiring this man's art and that man's scope."

<sup>27</sup> Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot, 20.

<sup>28</sup> Matthiessen, The Achievement of T. S. Eliot, 103.

<sup>29</sup> The Litany of The Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph Daily Missal, 1305.

<sup>30</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 55.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 235.

#### CHAPTER IV:

<sup>1</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 125.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, A Hope for Poetry, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Eliot, "Thoughts After Lambeth," Selected Essays, 368.

<sup>4</sup> I owe the suggestion for this investigation to my supervisor, Dr. Sheila Watson.

<sup>5</sup> Eliot, The Classics and The Man of Letters, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Eliot, "Virgil and The Christian World," On Poetry and Poets, 138.

<sup>7</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 153.

<sup>8</sup> The distinction between "demotic" and "classical" concerns not only the development of a language but the appropriateness of that language at a particular moment, the "young man carbuncular" is such an example.

<sup>9</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 153.

<sup>10</sup> Eliot, "Virgil and The Christian World," 137.

<sup>11</sup> Eliot: quoted by Southam, A Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot, 71.

<sup>12</sup> Dante, Hell, XXVII, 64-66.

<sup>13</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 35.



<sup>14</sup> Eliot, "What Dante Means to Me," To Criticize The Critic, 134.

<sup>15</sup> Eliot, "Dante," 250.

<sup>16</sup> Eliot, "What Dante Means to me," 128.

<sup>17</sup> Dante, Purgatory, XXVI, 145-148.

<sup>18</sup> Southam notes that lines 215-233 of The Waste Land may be modelled on Dante, Purgatorio VIII: "It was now the hour that turns back the desire of those who sail the seas and melts their heart, that day when they have said farewell to their dear friends, and that pierces the new pilgrim with love, if from far off he hears the chimes which seem to mourn for the dying day"(1-6). A Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Leavis, New Bearings, 91.

<sup>20</sup> Richards, Science and Poetry, 76, n.1.

<sup>21</sup> Eliot, "Philip Massinger," 214.

<sup>22</sup> Her name comes from Madame Sesotris, a fake fortune teller, who appears in the novel Chrome Yellow (1921), by Aldous Huxley, (Chapter XXVII). A Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot, 74-75.

<sup>23</sup> Eliot, Notes on the Waste Land, 81.

<sup>24</sup> Eliot, "What Dante Means to Me," 127.

<sup>25</sup> Tate, "T. S. Eliot's Ash Wednesday," Essays, 466.

<sup>26</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 155.

<sup>27</sup> McElderry, "Eliot's Shakespearian Rag," 185. We are perhaps prepared for this last dialogue by an echo of a popular song of 1912. The lines,  
0 0 0 0 that Shakespearian Rag--  
It's so elegant  
So intelligent, (128-130)

may have their source in:

That Shakespearian rag,--  
Most intelligent, very elegant,  
That old classical drag.

<sup>28</sup> cf. Murder in The Cathedral. There is a polarity between Thomas and the women of Canterbury, and their separation is more than sexual.

<sup>29</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 143-144.

<sup>30</sup> Eliot, Notes on the Waste Land, 84.

<sup>31</sup> Eliot, "Dante," 256.



<sup>32</sup> cf. the last stanza of Dans le Restaurant:  
 Phlébas, le Phénicien, pendant quinze jours noyé,  
 Oubliait les cris des mouettes et la houle de Cornouaille,  
 Et les profits et les pertes, et la cargaison d'étain:  
 Un courant de sous-mer l'emporta très loin,  
 Le repassant aux étapes de sa vie antérieure.  
 Figurez-vous donc, c'était un sort pénible;  
 Cependant, ce fut jadis un bel homme, de haute taille.

<sup>33</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 148-149.

<sup>34</sup> Eliot, Notes on the Waste Land, 84.

<sup>35</sup> I owe this suggestion to Mr. Peter Montgomery whose graduate research concerns The Waste Land as city.

<sup>36</sup> Southam, A Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 150. "The thunder's DA is one of those primordial Indo-European roots that recur in the Oxford Dictionary, a random leaf of the Sibyl's to which a thousand derivative words, now automatic currency, were in their origins so many explicit glosses. If the race's most permanent wisdom is its oldest, then DA, the voice of the thunder and of the Hindu sages, is the cosmic voice not yet dissociated into echoes."

<sup>38</sup> Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, IV, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Southam, A Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot, 91-92.

<sup>40</sup> Leavis, New Bearings, 103.

<sup>41</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 153.

## CHAPTER V:

<sup>1</sup> Beringause, "Journey Through The Waste Land," 89.

<sup>2</sup> New York Times Book Review, (29 November 1953)

<sup>3</sup> Eliot, The Idea of a Christian Society, 63-64.

<sup>4</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 251.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



<sup>8</sup> Eliot, "Hamlet and His Problems," The Sacred Wood, 100. Eliot defines the "objective correlative" as "...a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."

<sup>9</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 247.

<sup>10</sup> Dickens, Our Mutual Friend, IV, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 274.

<sup>12</sup> Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot, 179n.

<sup>13</sup> Mallarme, "Donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu," from Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, The Sin of Wit, 131.

<sup>15</sup> Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot, 180.

<sup>16</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 274.

<sup>17</sup> Eliot, "Yeats," On Poetry and Poets, 302.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 303.

<sup>19</sup> Eliot, "What Dante Means to Me," 128.

<sup>20</sup> Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 256-257.

<sup>21</sup> Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot, 167.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>23</sup> The Bhagavad-Gita, V, 3. from Zaehner, Hindu Scriptures, 271.

<sup>24</sup> Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot, 182.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, De Anima, III, 10: quoted by Kenner, The Invisible Poet, 254.

<sup>26</sup> The Eucharist is the symbolic renewal of the sacrifice on the cross. In the Roman Church the bread and wine of the mass is "trans-substantiated" and becomes the body and blood of Christ.

<sup>27</sup> Gardner, The Art of T. S. Eliot, 174.

<sup>28</sup> Kenner, Ezra Pound, 294.

<sup>29</sup> The lyric section of Little Gidding was set to music by Igor Stravinsky. See: Stravinsky and Craft, Expositions and Developments, 153-157, for the text and music. The most interesting aspect of the music is that Stravinsky gives one musical note to each word thus catching the pattern of Eliot's poetic rhythm.



<sup>30</sup> Shapiro, In Defense of Ignorance, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Kierkegaard is the most familiar figure.

<sup>32</sup> Cavafy, Complete Poems, 36.

<sup>33</sup> Seferis, On The Greek Style, 140.

<sup>34</sup> Two poems were published: For Ammones Who Died at the Age of 29 in the Year 610, and If He Did Die.

<sup>35</sup> Poulet, The Metamorphoses of The Circle, 346.



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